

Neo-Smārtas

ISKCON's Greatest Danger



Kaunteya das

a member of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness
Founder-*Ācārya*: His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

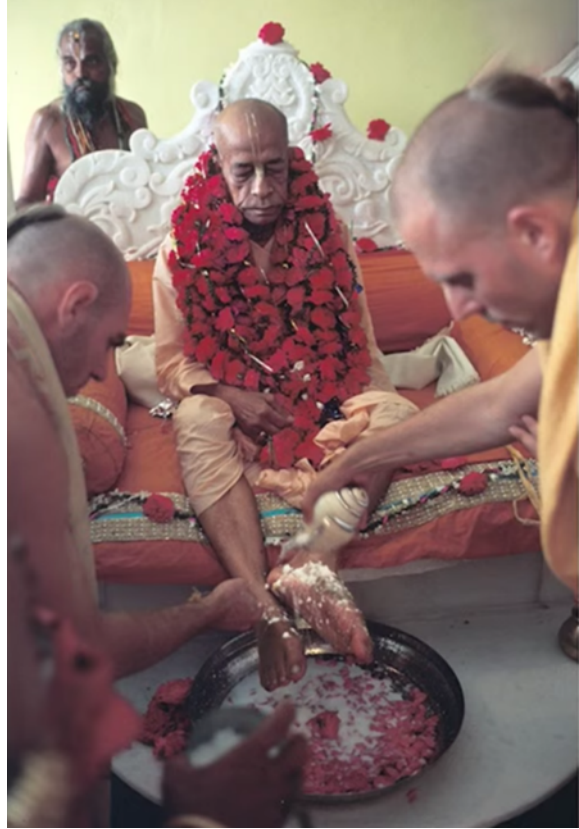


EYE of the STORM



"The *ācāryas* who advocate the *daiva-varṇāśrama* (the social order of *cātur-varṇyam* mentioned in the *Bhagavad-gītā*) do not accept the proposition of *āśura-varṇāśrama*, which maintains that the social order of *varṇa* is indicated by birth."

- *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*,
Madhya-līlā 3.6. purport



*Affectionately dedicated
to all the sincere, loyal
ISKCON leaders
serving in India.*

*May they all access
the philosophical clarity,
the intellectual integrity,
and the spiritual strength
to **reject and eject**
the neo-smārta poison,
thus protecting and
purifying
Srila Prabhupada's
Society*

Neo-Smārtas - ISKCON's Greatest Danger

Version dated 4th November 2023

Kaunteya das - a member of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness - Founder-*Ācārya*: His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

Copyright: © Eye of the Storm 2023

All quotations from Srila Prabhupada's books, lectures, conversations, and letters, as well as any illustration from BBT publications:

© The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust International

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

For more information on Krishna consciousness: www.krishna.com

For more information on ISKCON: <https://iskconnews.org/>

To contact the author: kaunteya.jps@iskcon.net

Neo-Smārtas

ISKCON's Greatest Danger

Kaunteya das

*a member of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness
Founder-Ācārya: His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda*



EYE of the STORM

Table of Contents

<i>Table of Contents</i>	7
<i>If You Are Not Angry, You Are Not Paying Attention</i>	11
"They Are All Enemies"	13
ISKCON India, Ki Jaya!	16
Important Note	17
A Spine-Chilling Foreboding?	18
This is Not a Book on "VDG"	18
A Note on Style	18
Representing a Murderous Legacy	20
<i>101 - Who Are the Smārtas? Who Are the Neo-smārtas?</i>	21
The "Outside Smārtas"	23
The "Inside Smārtas"	24
<i>The Neo-smārtas' Broken Compass</i>	26
"Four Works Are Sufficient"	29
Relative Importance & Authority of Śāstra	30
Interpolations Make Certain Śāstra Unreliable	31
Offense Number 23	34
Going Directly Against Krishna & Srila Prabhupada	34
<i>"The Treasonous, Demonic Threats of These People"</i>	39
<i>The Long History of Conflict e³ Uneasy Co-existence</i>	41
The <i>Dvija-patnīs</i> and Their <i>Smārta</i> Husbands	41
<i>Smārta</i> Bashing in the Gita	42
Lord Caitanya's Childhood Anti- <i>smārta</i> Campaign	43
The <i>Smārtas</i> Try to Sabotage the Lord's Mission	45
The <i>Apa-sampradāyas</i> Ruin the Movement	47
The Delicate Dance of Coexistence	48
When the <i>Smārtas</i> Directly Infiltrated Our <i>Sampradāya</i>	50
Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura's Exposes the <i>Smārtas</i> ; They Try to Murder Him	52
Srila Prabhupada: More Tensions & Conflict	53

<i>Misusing e³ Misclassifying Śāstra</i>	57
<i>Śāstra: Trotting or Galloping?</i>	57
Manu-samhitist, Sophist & Escapist.....	60
Fake News in Sanskrit Are Still Fake News	64
Books Are the Basis - Abusing <i>Śāstra</i> Destroys Everything.....	65
Beware of the Pseudo-Vedic Path.....	66
The <i>Vaidika, Pañcarātrika & Bhāgavata</i> Paths.....	67
Subverting the Epistemic Hierarchies.....	70
Seeking Support Outside of the <i>Sampradāya</i>	73
Premise: Nothing Wrong With Talking with Other Traditions	73
How Could They Be Qualified to Settle ISKCON's Internal Debates?.....	73
Trouble in Paradise.....	74
Misleading Interviews	75
<i>The War on Srila Prabhupada</i>	80
His Letters Are at Times More Important than His Books	80
Discrediting Lectures, Letters & Conversations	84
Recording Srila Prabhupada's Conversations - A Waste of Tape?	85
Why They Detest the Lectures, Letters & Conversations So Much?	86
Branding Srila Prabhupada's Instructions as "Anecdotal" and Throwing Them Away	89
<i>ISKCON Smārtas e³ ISKCON Prākṛta-sabajīyās</i>	92
ISKCON <i>Prākṛta-sabajīyās</i>	94
ISKCON <i>Smārtas</i>	95
Srila Prabhupada Was Aware of the <i>Apa-sampradāya</i> ' Influence on ISKCON.....	97
<i>Apa-sampradāya</i> Contamination: "It Is Coming Since a Long Time".....	98
Pervasive Impersonalism	99
<i>The War on Women</i>	101
"If There Is First-Class Men, Then Whole Question Is Solved"	103
An Overwhelming Inferiority Complex	105
Fear of Educated Women	107
Book Distribution: Against <i>Strī-dharma</i>	108
"As Good as Their Brothers"	112
Could It Be Just Plain Envy?	113
Are the Rights the Same or Not?	114
"Strī-dharma-paddhati" - a Book Neo- <i>smārtas</i> Would Love	116
<i>A Beloved Speculation: Women Have No Varṇa</i>	119
No <i>Varṇa</i> , Just Like Cows	119
Bovine Transferral Episodes	120

Women: Colorless Mirrors?	122
Women As Simply Men's Shadows.....	123
If Women Have No <i>Varṇa</i> , Why Vedic Astrology Evaluates It?	124
The Sun & the Moon	125
Mixed Marriages & Mixed Progeny Show that Women Have Their Own <i>Varṇa</i>	126
On a Social Level, the Wife Takes the <i>Varṇa</i> of the Husband - and Vice-versa.....	128
Why Is This So Important for Neo- <i>smārtas</i> ?	129
A "Theory" for a Bygone Era	130
Can Women Become <i>Brāhmaṇas</i> ?	132
How Could They Worship the Deities Otherwise?	133
Debunking the Boston Rebellion Myth.....	135
<i>Gauḍīya-vaiṣṇavism: Freedom from Casteism</i>	141
"If You Can Remain <i>Brāhmacāriṇī</i> That Is Very Nice, Very Nice"	143
Sri Prabhupada, Harbinger of a New Era of Women's Empowerment	147
The Prescribed Duties for the Golden Age	149
<i>Valid Arguments Against VDG? Zero.</i>	153
The Body, Oh, the Body!	153
<i>Sikṣa</i> But Not <i>Dikṣa</i> ?	154
What a <i>Dikṣa-guru</i> Does? Why <i>Vaiṣṇavis</i> Couldn't Do It?	155
The Suniti Hallucination.....	156
A Different Age; A Different Ball Game	158
The Rape of the <i>Bharaḍvaja-sambhita</i>	162
Premise	162
Fact: the <i>Bharaḍvaja-sambhita</i> approves of Vaisnavi <i>Dikṣa-gurus</i>	163
Who Is a Bona Fide Guru?	163
The Rape Begins	166
Perfect Agreement Between Krishna, Lord Caitanya, the <i>Śāstra</i> & the <i>Acāryas</i>	167
Betraying <i>Bharaḍvaja Muni</i> and His Descendants	170
Devious Trickery	170
A Maha-Problem: Stopping Men Too	171
Another Maha-Problem: Completely Missing the Function of <i>Pāñcarātra</i> Literature	171
The <i>Bharaḍvaja-sambhita</i> Rapists Appointed as Scriptural Authorities.....	172
Neo- <i>smārtas</i> : Unwilling to Learn	172
Quote Anything to Prevent VDGs - But Not Gopala Bhatta Goswami!	173
It Finally Sank In: It's the Ritual, Stupid!.....	174
If Sri Prabhupada Didn't Want VDGs, He Would Have Clearly Said It	177
What Part of "All of My Disciples" Don't They Understand?	178
Further Reading	180
<i>Neo-smārta Varṇāśrama, Same as Āsura-varṇāśrama?</i>	181
"One Cannot Suddenly Change a Community's Social Customs."	184
One More Neo- <i>smārta</i> Trickery: Falsely Claiming Monopoly on "Traditionalism"	185

Further Reading	188
<i>Srila Prabhupada: Lenient with Sensual Weaknesses, Strict with Philosophical Deviations</i>	189
The "ISKCON India Scholars Board" Preaches <i>Māyāvāda</i>	190
Neo- <i>smārta</i> s: Worse than the Ritviks	193
How Could It Happen? What's Next?	195
<i>Appendix One - Which Vedic Culture? "Open" or "Closed"?</i>	198
Introduction: The Timeless Jihad.....	198
Vedic Culture - Not Immune to Clashes of Civilization.....	199
The Vedic Incubator: The Orthodox, Antiseptic Glass Box	201
<i>Āsura-varṇāśrama</i> , Good or Bad?	202
<i>Yukta-Vairāgya</i> as the Golden Middle Path	203
<i>Yukta-Vairāgya</i> as the Basis of True Spiritual Universalism.....	204
Modern <i>Acāryas</i> Teach Vaisnava-Vedic Universalism	205
Concluding Remarks	206
<i>Appendix Two - Geopolitical Consequences of Smārtaiism</i>	207
<i>Appendix Three - Who Are These People?</i>	212
Where Are These People Coming From? How Did We Get to the Present Situation?	215
Watering the Weeds	216
Neo- <i>smārta</i> Explosion.....	218
<i>About the Author</i>	221

If You Are Not Angry, You Are Not Paying Attention

Back in March 2023 I announced my intention to address the issue of ISKCON members adopting and promoting *smārta* ideas; ideas that may *appear* in line with *śāstra*, but that in fact challenge the teachings of Lord Caitanya and adulterate Srila Prabhupada's movement with incompatible views. When I started communicating, I was surprised by the online expressions of support:

"Thank you for speaking up!"

"OMG. Thank you so much"

"Thanks prabhu. I also have this strong feeling. We should protect ISKCON from these subtle attacks. Purity is the force."

"I agree totally; just so happy more devotees are waking up to this attack. Together we can stand together against it."

"Unfortunately this is the reality . . . probably the most serious threat to our society. It's time to take the danger seriously."

"I have observed this trend & feel concerned about how it's deviating devotees from Srila Prabhupada's mission. This is a vital discussion."

"The problem we are facing is that the values and attitudes of an *apa-sampradāya* (therefore antagonistic to Gaudiya orthodoxy and orthopraxy) are contaminating ISKCON."

"I share your concerns. There is a right-wing element often seeking to promote themselves as being the most strict in their adherence to the Vedas. Their attitudes



NEO-SMĀRTA INFILTRATION

If you are not **ANGRY**, you
are not paying **ATTENTION**

towards 'the West' and 'women' . . . is barely distinguishable from the Taliban. And they are threatening to tear the movement in two over their fanatical views . . . It is a return to casteism. It's antithetical to Krishna consciousness as taught by Srila Prabhupada."

"What took you so long?" was the mild, benevolent rebuke from a Srila Prabhupada disciple.

These and other expressions of concern (and gratitude) made me realize that so many devotees, all over the world, including India, are painfully aware of the problem. An Indian leader for instance, a *brahmacari*, wrote me:

"This pervasive environment of *smārta* mentality and mindset is one of most frustrating, suffocating, disgusting and damaging thing . . . surely for me and surely for lot of devotees around me. Thank you for writing these up. It is as if so many things of subconscious mind have been vocalized and given words."



As an illustration for my first public posting, I chose a carnivorous dinosaur because it represents a mortal danger and symbolizes the archaic, outdated views that the neo-*smārtas* are trying to impose on ISKCON.

I believe the situation is serious; the pure principles of Gaudiya-vaisnavism are under attack; and the neo-*smārtas* are increasingly capturing more influence and power. The pouring of support from India and abroad made me realize that many, many devotees are sick and tired of the neo-*smārtas*' shenanigans.

Some readers might not be aware of the inroads that this contamination has already made in ISKCON. Some readers might not have yet perceived the deviations being spread in the name of *traditionalism* and *Vedic culture*. Perhaps you noticed some tension but took it as normal differences of opinion among devotees; but here we are not talking about usual, natural disagreements; we are talking about a threat of cataclysmic dimensions, a conflict that can turn Srila Prabhupada's movement into a monstrosity; a degradation he would never condone.

Frankly, I don't care much about the multitudes of *smārtas* "out there." They have existed for a long time, with their impersonalim-infected notions and their contaminated religiosity. I wish them all the best; let them go to heaven, to hell, or to whatever destination their beliefs and practices carry them. I am not that

interested in the kaleidoscopic permutations of *smārtaism* outside of our movement, but I am concerned about the integrity of ISKCON and the infiltration of the "neo-*smārtas*."

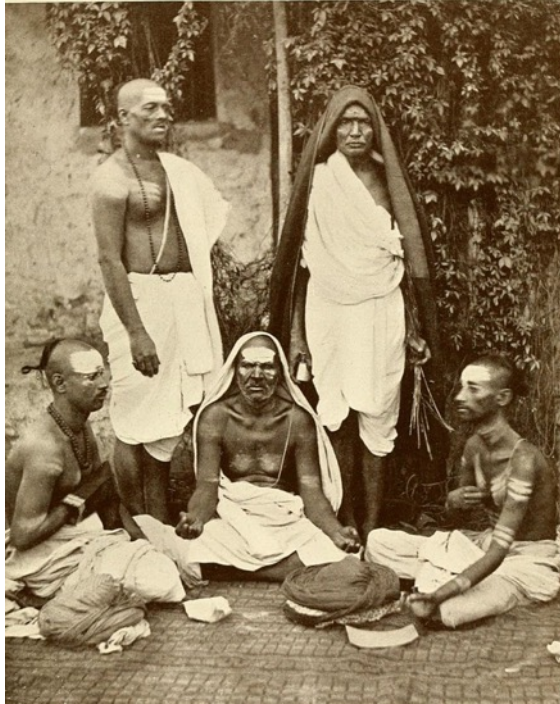


"They Are All Enemies"

The *smārtas*, even if diligently following their religious rituals, are traditionally considered antagonistic to Vaisnavas: "They are all enemies." Srila Prabhupada said, "The Māyāvādī *sannyāsīs*, *smārta-panḍitas*, all of them." (Morning Walk, Hyderabad, 24 April 1974)

Smarta contaminations are not circumscribed to specific centuries or geographical boundaries. The *smārta* mentality finds ever-fresh rejuvenation through the penchant of conditioned souls to mistake mundane morality and caste-based regulations for spiritual life. The *smārta* attitudes find fertile terrain in the tendency to enjoy and exploit one's material privileges connected to birth, race, gender, social position or whatever.

Between *smārtas* and Vaisnavas there have always been disagreements, practically on everything, even on subjects that should be based on pragmatic, mathematical considerations: "There is always a difference of opinion between a *smārta-brāhmaṇa* and a Vaiṣṇava *gosvāmī*." Srila Prabhupada writes, "There are even *smārta* opinions and Vaiṣṇava *gosvāmī* opinions available in astrological and astronomical calculations." (*Cc Madhya*, 3.85, purport)



Srila Prabhupada offers another example: "Regarding the worship of our Gaura Nitai by women *pujaris*, we worship Lord Caitanya in His householder life when He was with His wife, and not as a *sannyasi*. So, it is alright for women to do this service. But, besides this, service is spiritual and there can be no material designation . . . According to the *smārta vidhi*, women cannot touch deity during menstrual period but the *goswami viddhi* allows. But it is better not to do it. One thing is that the *seva* can never be stopped for any reason. This also for the cooking." (Letter to Amsu, 13 Aug 1974)

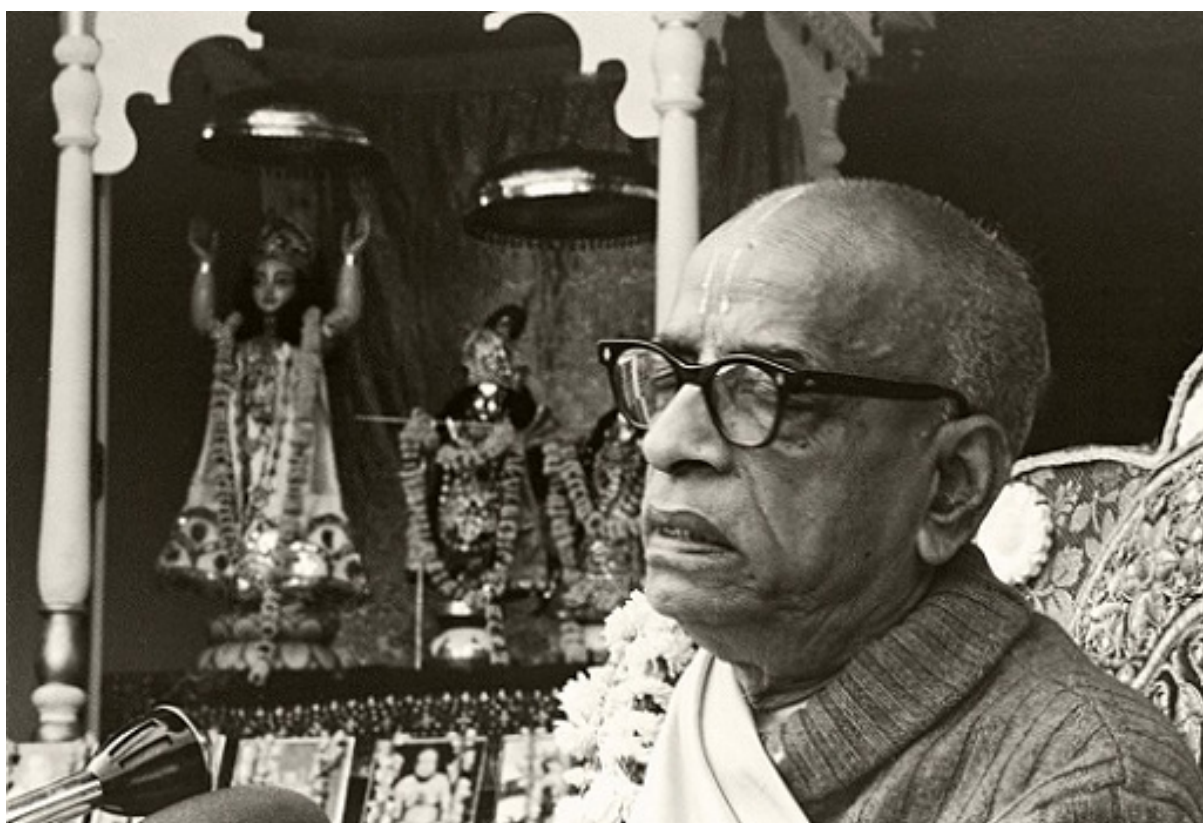
This book focuses on the heretical neo-*smārta* phenomenon - ISKCON devotees who adopt and spread *smārta* attitudes. They may be strict in moral standards and external behavior, but by disseminating *smārta* ideas they profoundly corrode the spirit of Gaudiya-vaisnavism and erode the spiritual fiber (and effectiveness) of ISKCON. They are particularly insidious because they mislead devotees from *within* Srila Prabhupada's Society.

Non-ISKCON *smārtas* are firmly outside the purview of the four authentic Vaisnava *sampradayas* and I don't find much interest in them. The universe is meant for rebellious souls and the *smārta* phenomenon, in all its assortments, is just another edition of conditional life; more sophisticated, more Indian, but still not aligned with the *yuga-avatara*. All loyal Gaudiya-vaisnavas would feel no attraction for the *smārta* bandwagon and its permutations, but even sincere devotees may become confused and allured when the same *smārta* doctrines are presented from within ISKCON, propagated by devotees with the *external symptoms* of Prabhupadanugas.

Neo-*smārta* deviations can be elusive for the untrained. The dangers are not always immediately or obviously recognizable. They often come packaged in lofty-sounding scriptural edicts and concealed by pseudo-Vedic gobbledygook. It's easier to mistake such ideas as uplifting, when in fact such doctrines seriously contradict Gaudiya-vaisnava tradition and teachings. Let me clarify one important point: I am not saying that rigorous brahminical life (cleanliness, regular worship, performing priestly rituals, etc.) is in itself "*smārta*." The Gaudiya *ācāryas* didn't complain about

brāhmaṇas strictly following hygienic rules or practicing detailed but bona fide liturgies. In fact, our *ācāryas* promoted such practices. No, the *smārtas* are branded as an *apa-sampradāya* for their mundane elitism, for their materialistic prejudices, for their body-based caste-consciousness, and for their socio-philosophical deviancy.

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the most munificent and liberal *avatara*, inaugurated a spiritual revolution, a mission to liberate and empower every man, woman, and child, equipping them to reach pure love of God and become instruments of His mercy. *Apa-sampradāya* impurities subtly but powerfully obstruct such flow of kindness by enmeshing the *sankirtana* movement with prejudices that are foreign and opposite to its magnanimous, inclusive spirit.



Such contaminations infect the mind and the mission, eclipsing the devotional priorities established by Srila Prabhupada, precluding the progress of individuals and communities. The neo-*smārta* fanatical and impractical views generate an ISKCON that is suffocating for the devotees and repulsive for discerning, educated people. We should not underestimate the power of the neo-*smārta* distortions in corrupting and dismantling Srila Prabhupada's legacy.

"Devotees who actually engage in devotional service with faith and love are inspired by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Vaisnavas are never concerned with ritualistic *smārta-brāhmaṇas*." (SB 8.20.14, purport) Srila Prabhupada tells us not to

be "concerned" with the *smārtas*, but mere indifference is not an option anymore, now that *smārtaism* is inside the Society, boldly broadcasted by devotees in positions of influence. We no longer possess the luxury of simply ignoring the *smārtas*. They have embedded themselves within ISKCON and are raucously vocal.

As the *smārtas* of old did, ISKCON's new *smārtas* also write books and commentaries: "**Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura says that sometimes these *smārta* caste *gosvāmīs* write books on Vaiṣṇava philosophy or commentaries on the original scriptures, but a pure devotee should cautiously avoid reading them.**" (Cc *Adi* 12.27, purport) Their "commentaries," resonate through their various websites (such as the site of the "ISKCON India Scholars Board"), through social media, and through rivers of emails. Their propaganda gushes forth, like rivulets flowing from inexhaustible sources of prejudice.

The saner ISKCON section wishes to have nothing to do with them, but their drums beat day and night; the vulnerable and inattentive can easily be affected. What to do? I am writing this book. I hope it gets into the hands of intelligent devotees who, aware of the danger, take a stand to defend Srila Prabhupada's movement and take steps to protect the flag of ISKCON from being snatched by the neo-*smārtas*.

The war between Gaudiyas and *smārtas* for defining *dharma* has been raging for centuries. This is not the time to relax and give up the fight.

ISKCON India, Ki Jaya!

ISKCON India has achieved a host of outstanding successes in a variety of fields, such as building temples and distributing sacred literature. Devotees of all *asramas* have generally worked very sincerely in practicing devotional service and promoting the mission. There have been sporadic moral aberrations such as child-abuse and wife-beating, or occasional ethical slips, such as adultery and pilfering of funds (a leader nicknamed "The Wacky Neanderthal" comes to mind...); but, all things considered, ISKCON members based in India have on average performed at exceptional levels of good behavior and dedication. Think of the Sri Sri Radha-Gopinatha temple and community in Chowpatty, Mumbai; think of the seventeen or more temples opened in and around Delhi; think of the millions of Srila Prabhupada books that went out; think of the millions of plates of *prasadam* served; think of all the Bhakti-vriksha, Counselor and Nama-hatta groups, active in so many towns and villages; think of the sincere efforts of so many Vaisnavas and Vaisnavis in

creating, maintaining and expanding so many urban communities, temples, outreach centers, farms and educational projects. It's remarkable. Marvelous. We should all be grateful and appreciative of what the leaders and their followers have accomplished in Bharata.



It's very sad and worrisome to see such a glorious section of ISKCON being infested by such serious *apa-sampradāya* pollution. This book is a humble but earnest appeal to protect the movement from the *smārta* threat. I can raise the alarm; I can unpack the deviations; but all devotees, especially the leaders, need to pay attention and act decisively to counteract the avalanche of misleading teachings.

Important Note

There are ISKCON devotees, in India, the Gulf, etc. who were born in *smārta-brāhmaṇa* families. When I talk about *smārtas* and neo-*smārtas* I am not referring to them (at least not necessarily so). I know some of them personally and can testify that by joining ISKCON, by learning the philosophy, and by serving the mission, they have shed whatever *smārta* baggage they might have been carrying and fully embraced the inclusive, "equal opportunity" spirit of Gaudiya-vaisnavism.

A Spine-Chilling Foreboding?



The late Suhotra Swami wrote in his book *Thirteen Apasampradayas*: "I have undertaken this work out of a firm belief that these thirteen cases are archetypical of all sorts of misrepresentations of the *sankirtan* movement of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu that have been seen down to this very day . . . the *smārta* contamination has a subtle side that ISKCON devotees would do well to familiarize themselves with. It is a shift of values more than of behavior or even philosophy . . . The *acara* of a strict *smārta-brāhmaṇa* and a strict vaishnava may externally be hardly distinguishable, but the consciousness is completely different."

These words, written some thirty years ago, sound ominous and premonitory today, almost prophetic. Today we can graphically observe the "shift of values" taking place due to the neo-*smārta* influence.

This is Not a Book on "VDG"

Yes, there will be a section about Vaisnavi *diksa-gurus* (VDG), as the issue has been the catalyst and impetus for the neo-*smārtas* to go public, to grow louder, to show their true *apa-sampradāya* colors, and to even threaten ISKCON with a schism. But their anti-VDG stand represents only the tip of the iceberg of neo-*smārta* unorthodoxy. I am not against the neo-*smārtas* because they are anti-VDG; they are anti-VDG because they are neo-*smārtas*. The difference is crucial.

A Note on Style

Some devotees felt disturbed by my frontal attack on neo-*smārtaism*. I respect those thus concerned as sattvic Vaisnavas, devotees who abhor confrontation and dislike conflict. I apologize if my strong words and images have somewhat agitated them; it wasn't my intention. Their feeling is understandable, but Srila Prabhupada said: **"We are facing so many difficulties. We don't care for it. We never compromise. All my students, they will never compromise. Why shall I compromise? If I am confident that I am speaking the truth, why shall I make compromise?"** (Interview, Bombay, 31 Dec 1976)

One devotee wrote me: "It seems you are afraid of *Smārta* philosophy." I replied: "I am not afraid; I am TERRIFIED of it." Others suggested I soften the terminology.



Another devotee wrote me: "Now it's clear. The purpose is to just to create a civil war." I replied: "The war has been going on for centuries."

But other devotees welcomed the uncompromising tone, and goaded me on with supportive comments:

"Jaya. Keep it up" - "Keep on please!" - "Euphoric and enthralling" - "If there is fire in the house, we need to put it off, no ifs and buts - at the cost of burning oneself a little."

"I would say that your language is even mild. Just continue and be even stronger. I am sick of euphemisms! And sick of chauvinism, nationalism and *smārtas* in our movement where the first lesson is: 'You are not the body, but a spirit soul!' Oh, the irony! Crush that ignorance!"

Besides appreciating the encouragement, I was also impressed that some devotees displayed a clear grasp of the situation. In a Facebook group, for instance, someone asked what this neo-*smārta* thing was all about. The group administrator answered: "Neo-*Smārtas* are some ISKCON members, mainly based in India, who are trying hard to turn the Vaishnavite tradition into a dogmatic version of the Varnasrama system, and from a monolithic view of time – all periods are the same and therefore what they believe was in practice 5000 years ago is applicable today. They seek to apply, for example, what was written in the Manu Samhita ages ago to current times

in western societies. This is an abhorrent dilution of the rich Vaishnavite tradition to a one-dimensional worldview, an insistence on a literal (and sexist, and misogynist, and impersonal) interpretation of Vedic scriptures, and of course also a concept that is out of touch with reality, that can never provide a tangible solution to people in the modern world."

Representing a Murderous Legacy

Please remember that the neo-*smārtas* are the cultural descendants of the caste *brāhmaṇas* who tried to assassinate Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura. At that time, they failed; but now their inheritors are infiltrating and gradually "murdering" the pure spirit of the *sampradāya*.



Every reader is humbly requested to ask himself or herself: what can I do to defend the Vaisnava society from this threat?

101 - Who Are the *Smārtas*? Who Are the Neo-*smārtas*?

Srila Prabhupada explains: "Followers of the *smṛti-śāstra* are called *smārtas*." (Cc *Madhya*, 7.109, purport) What are the *smṛti-śāstra*? "*Sruti* means Vedas," Srila Prabhupada says, "and *smṛti* means books derived from Vedic knowledge." (Lecture, Boston, 6 May 1968)

One may wonder: "What's wrong with that? Aren't we supposed to follow the *smṛti-śāstra*? Isn't obeying the scriptures necessary and glorious?" Yes, for leading a civilized and spiritually progressive life it's essential to follow *śāstra* - both *śrutis* and *smṛtis*. "If you follow the principles as laid down in the *śāstras*, then success is sure." (Initiation Lecture, London, 22 Aug 1971). "If you do not follow the injunction of the *śāstra*, then there is no possibility of attaining perfection." (Lecture, Gorakhpur, 17 Feb 1971)

Without following *śāstra* there is no hope in life, but different people follow *śāstra* with different motivations, different understandings, different aspirations, and therefore they reach different destinations. In the *Bhagavad-gīta* (2.42-43), Lord Krishna describes some of the Vedic followers as "Men of small knowledge . . . Being desirous of sense gratification and opulent life, they say that there is nothing more than this." Not exactly the purest of drives, even when pursued through sacred texts. So, not everything "Vedic" or "*śāstric*" is motivated by spiritual desires. Also, in the vast ocean of Vedic literature and Indian traditions, not all *śāstras* are on the same level; and it's not that whatever is called "*śāstra*" is divinely revealed.

The issue is subtle; the followers of Rupa Goswami, the *Rupanugas* (which include all ISKCON devotees), should certainly follow *śruti* and *smṛti* - but only those texts recommended by the Gaudiya *ācāryas*. And the texts should be received *as they are*, without deceitful mistranslations and misinterpretations. Srila Prabhupada explains:

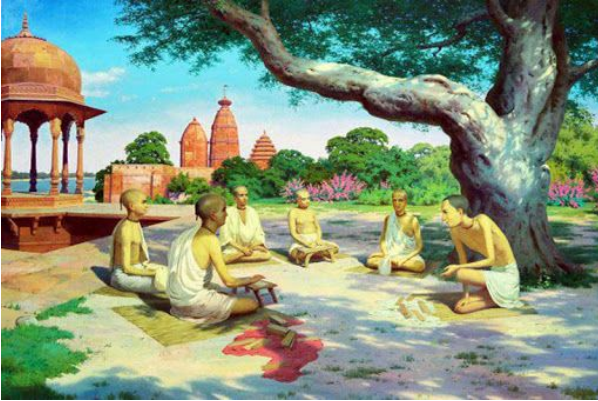
"Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī in his *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* says:



*śruti-smṛti-purāṇādi-
pañcarātra-vidhiṁ vinā
aikāntikī harer bhaktir
utpātāyaiva kalpate*

The purport is that to become a devotee one must follow the principles laid down in *śruti* and *smṛti*. One must follow the codes of the *Purāṇas* and the *pañcarātrikī-vidhi*. One cannot be a pure devotee without following the *śruti* and *smṛti*, and the *śruti* and *smṛti* without devotional service cannot lead one to the perfection of life." (SB 7.11.7, purport)

A shallow, artificial stress on *śāstra* (but separate from the directions of the *ācāryas*) can be very tempting, because "the desire tree of Vedic knowledge" can fulfill even material desires, subtle or gross. The true *ācārya* won't encourage or entertain polluted aspirations but will cut all nonsense with the sword of knowledge, stressing the essence, the conclusion, the devotional *siddhanta*.



That's why Srinivasa Acarya glorifies the Six Goswami (*Śrī Śrī Ṣaḍ-gosvāmy-aṣṭaka*, verse two): "*nānā-śāstra-vicāraṇaika-nipuṇau sad-dharma-saṁsthāpakau*"; they were scrutinizingly studying the various *śāstra* to extract the essence, to establish real *dharma* so that people could progress in life, not to overburden them with outdated

practices. The true followers of the Six Goswamis don't "shop around" the "*śāstra* supermarket," capriciously seeking confirmation for their theories - an activity dear to the neo-*smārtas*.

Often the ISKCON neo-*smārtas* simultaneously stress "*śāstra*" (keeping it as a general, unexplored, and vague notion) while minimizing the direct teachings of the Founder-*Ācārya*. They often substitute themselves to the *ācārya*, picking and choosing references that fit their prejudices and support their beliefs. And if a text doesn't align with their ideas, they can mistranslate it. This posturing allows them to falsify and weaponize *śāstra*, producing a culture of disloyalty, elitism, and heterodoxy - all in the name of *śāstra*! For instance, Gaudiyas accept the *Bharadvaja-saṁhita* as a bona fide, canonical text, but the neo-*smārtas* have twisted its message to support their heretical views (more on this later).



Neo-*smārtas* represent the proverbial wolves in sheep's clothing; they talk so much about *śāstra*, but often smuggle their contaminated theories by quoting *śāstra* that are not relevant for Vaisnavas.

The Bible also uses the same metaphor: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but

inwardly are ravening wolves." (Matthew 7:15) Devotees should recognize that below a veneer of respect and deference to the scriptures, the neo-*smārtas* endeavor to introduce casteist ideas incompatible with Srila Prabhupada's teachings.

The "Outside *Smārtas*"

In India, *smārtas* have been around for thousands of years and come in different mixed-up forms. Wikipedia, for instance, reports: "There has been a considerable overlap in the ideas and practices of the Smarta tradition with other significant historic movements within Hinduism, namely Shaivism, Brahmanism, Vaishnavism, and Shaktism . . . The Smarta tradition is aligned with Advaita Vedanta,



"Adi Sri Shankara creates the Smarta tradition," by S. Rajam (1919-2010), water media on paper.

and regards Adi Shankara as its founder or reformer."¹ This last point should be enough for all ISKCON devotees to firmly distance themselves from *smārta* ideas.

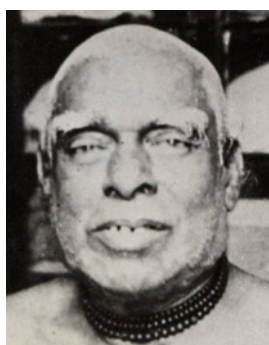
What has traditionally made the relation tricky is that both *smārtas* and Vaisnavas have a lot in common, such as the fundamental acceptance of Vedic scriptures. In

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smarta_tradition

some cases, the texts and references may be the same, but the mood and interpretation differ. This commonality of textual references makes the two groups naturally interlinked, and at times somehow interlocked (as we will see later).



Our *Ācāryas* have declared that *smārtas* belong to an *apa-sampradāya*. They are affiliates of an "anti-*sampradāya*," a group not belonging to any of the four bona fide Vaisnava disciplic successions. What's even more problematic and insidious is that some *smārta* branches and other heterodox lineages have been presenting themselves as spiritual descendants of Mahāprabhu:



"There are so many *apasampradāyas*, thirteen at least in the counting by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura: *āula, bāula, kartābhajā, neḍā, daraveśa, sāni, sahajiyā, sakhībekhī . . . smārta, jāta-gosāñi, ativāḍī, cūḍādhārī, gaurāṅga-nāgarī*. These thirteen, fourteen *apasampradāyas*. They are passing as Caitanya Mahāprabhu's *sampradāya*. But they're the worst, rejected." (Conversation, Bhubaneswar, 24 Jan 1977)

The "Inside *Smārtas*"

We differentiate the "inside *smārtas*" from the "outside *smārtas*" by classifying the ISKCON variety as "neo-*smārtas*." When analyzing their operations in ISKCON, we must keep in mind, among other things:

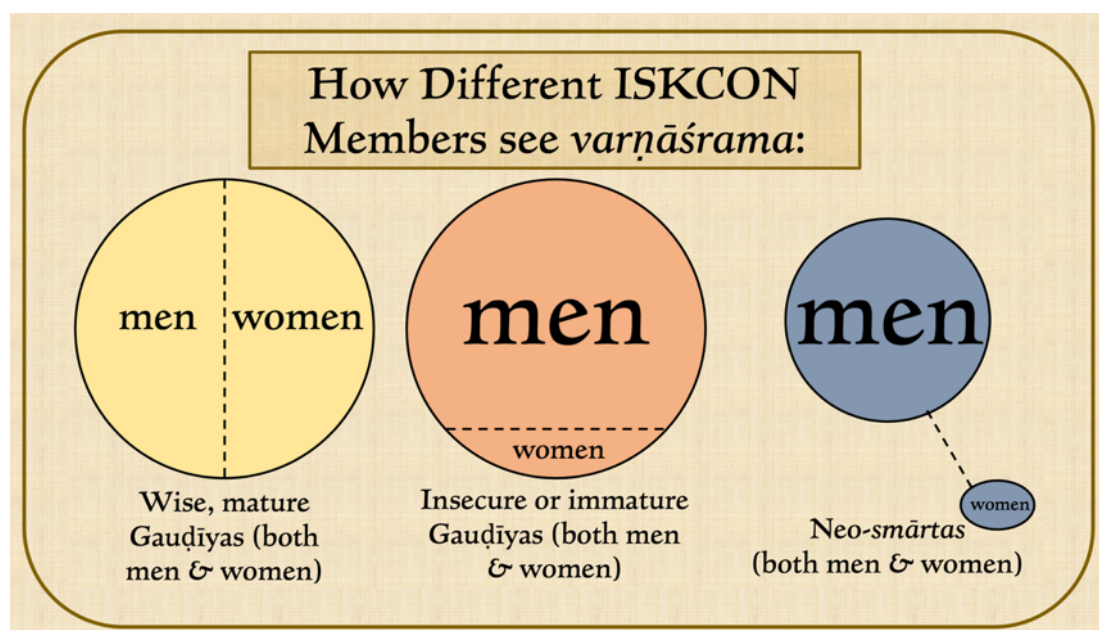
1. Neo-*smārtas* may present typical external Gaudiya-vaisnava characteristics (in their personal histories, practices, and appearance).
2. Neo-*smārtas* may display an acquaintance with Sanskrit, with Indian languages, and with scriptural codicils that is quantitatively superior to the average ISKCON devotee.
3. Neo-*smārtas* may exhibit flurries of indiscriminate *śāstric* quotes to support their theories (often quotes that the average ISKCON devotee is not familiar with, and therefore unequipped to handle).
4. Neo-*smārtas* shall not acknowledge being vehicles of *smārta* views and attitudes. They will reject the label despite all evidence.

5. Some neo-*smārtas* might not even be aware of being promoters of *smārta* ideas; they may just imagine to be most loyal followers Srila Prabhupada, working for the purity and Vedicization of ISKCON.

6. Some neo-*smārtas* have captured vital institutional posts and use those pedestals (and the respect that comes with it) as platforms for *apa-sampradāya* proselytism (and for badgering their opponents).

In a social media exchange, someone asked: "The way I see it, the idea of the *smārtas* is basically to revive *varṇāśrama*. If this is the case, then what's the problem considering Srila Prabhupada's direct order of introducing *varṇāśrama* into ISKCON?"

Someone else wisely replied: "The problem is not in reviving *varṇāśrama*, the problem is that neo-*smārtas* [implicitly] say that *varṇāśrama* is higher than *bhakti*. That *bhakti* is impotent without *varṇāśrama*; first *varṇāśrama*, then only you can advance in *bhakti*. That is *apa-siddhanta*, and that makes the followers of *smārta-vada* wrong . . . I have listened to some of them daily on *varṇāśrama* for ten years, and they would usually not admit, that they put *varṇāśrama* above *bhakti*. But they do. *Mayavadis* don't admit being *mayavadis*. *Prakṛita sahajiyās* feel offended to be defined as such, and misogynists cannot understand that they hate women; so neo-*smārtas* also talk away such confrontations with word-jugglery."



Later we will speak a little about *varṇāśrama*, briefly delineating *varṇāśrama* in the three modes of nature (by the way, neo-*smārtas* detest when one identifies their notion of *varṇāśrama* as "*varṇāśrama* in *tamo-guṇa*"; but that's what it is).

The Neo-*smārtas*' Broken Compass

Since the concept of *śāstra* is central to our discussion, let's understand the etymology of the word:

"*Śāstra* means that which controls. *Śās-dhātu*. *Śastra*, *śāstra*, *śāsana*, *śiṣya* comes from the same root. *Śiṣya*. *Śiṣya* also comes from the same root. *Śiṣya* means one agrees voluntarily to be governed by the spiritual master. He's called *śiṣya*. And *śāsana*, the government. So *śāstra* means that regulates our daily activities." (Lecture on SB 6.1.8-13, New York, 24 July 1971)

There is a vast variety of *śāstra*, from those directly focusing on pure devotional service, to those regulating meat-eating. A *śāstra* giving detailed information on how to kill a goat on *amāvasyā*, the night of the dark moon, is also *śāstra*, but certainly not at the same level of, say, *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita*.

Some of the texts within the Indo-Vedic tradition are, so to speak, *śāstra* "in name only" - at least according to the usual consideration ISKCON devotees have of the concept of *śāstra*. They don't represent divine revelation or the authoritative insights of advanced devotional saints. Srila Prabhupada calls them "**material *dharma-śāstra***." (Lecture on Bg 7.7, Sanand, 27 Dec 1975) They may offer directions for civilized mundane life, but they are fundamentally conflicting with pure *Bhagavata* values: "**In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, a distinction between real religion and pretentious religion has been clearly made.**" Therefore the *Bhagavatam*: "**rejects the cheating ways of materially motivated religiosity.**" (Cc Adi 1.91, from purport and



translation) Each of these "cheating ways" have their own *śāstra*, they own conventions and handbooks - and their own teachers.

Obviously, we can't equate *śāstras* like the *Gīta* or the *Bhagavatam* to, say, the *kāma-śāstra*: "Devahūti wanted the passion of her husband to be increased by the arrangement mentioned in the *kāma-śāstra*." (SB 2.23.11, purport)

The *Niti-śāstra*, to give another example, is a collection of moral instructions compiled by Canakya Pandita, a "worldly man":

Prabhupāda: Cāṇakya Paṇḍita. He was a great politician and brahmin . . .

Hamsadūta: He was a great devotee?

Devotee: No.

Hamsadūta: No? . . .

Prabhupāda: He was very learned scholar, brahmin, rigid brahmin. That's all . . .

Yamunā: He wasn't a great devotee?

Prabhupāda: No.

Yamunā: So he's not authority.

Prabhupāda: No, no, he was not authority in the spiritual sense. He was a politician—moralist, politician. That's all. Worldly man.

(Conversation, Indore, 13 Dec 1970)

This exchange between Srila Prabhupada and his young disciples (who at that time were new to India) shows that something like the *Niti-śāstra* is also called *śāstra* but it's just a collection of ethical, political, or economic maxims, useful for leading a cultured life, but certainly not on the level of the core scriptures of the Gaudiyas.



John Milton, 1608-1674
(although Srila Prabhupada
quoted him, he is not a
sāmpradaya ācāryā).

Someone wrote on social media that because Srila Prabhupada quoted Canakya Pandita it means that he endorses "whatever he says." No, this is a great misunderstanding, Srila Prabhupada quoted a number of people; he quoted Socrates, he quoted Shakespeare, he quoted Rabindranath Tagore, he quoted English poets William Cowper and John Milton. In fact, he quoted Milton even in the *Caitanya-caritamrita*: "the living of a miserable life in the material world by dint of the soul's choice is nicely illustrated by Milton in *Paradise Lost*." (Cc Adi 5.22, purport) That doesn't turn Milton or Tagore or Shakespeare into *ācāryas*. Same as with Canakya Pandita, a "worldly man."

This is an important point because a consummate tactic of the neo-*smārtas* is to muddle socio-theological issues by quoting less pertinent or irrelevant sources as primary authority. For instance, a recent paper by the "ISKCON India Scholars Board" (a hotbed of *smārtāism*) declares: "Śrīla Prabhupāda accepted Cāṇakya as a Vedic authority" ("Śrīla Prabhupāda's Authority in his Books and Other Contexts," 31 July 2023). The statement is demonstrably false. Srila Prabhupada never said that Cāṇakya was a "Vedic authority."

Obviously, when one takes a **"worldly man,"** someone who **"was not authority in the spiritual sense"** as a "Vedic authority," one's entire notion of *evidence* gets distorted. By taking the **"material *dharma-sāstra*"** as primary references, the whole concept of *dharma* gets polluted. The spreading of such epistemic aberrations confounds the devotees, misleading and disorienting them. Just as a sailor using a broken compass may end up lost in the middle of the ocean, devotees bamboozled by the neo-*smārta* propaganda may end up engaged in **"the cheating ways of materially motivated religiosity"** while thinking that they are becoming more and more "Vedic."

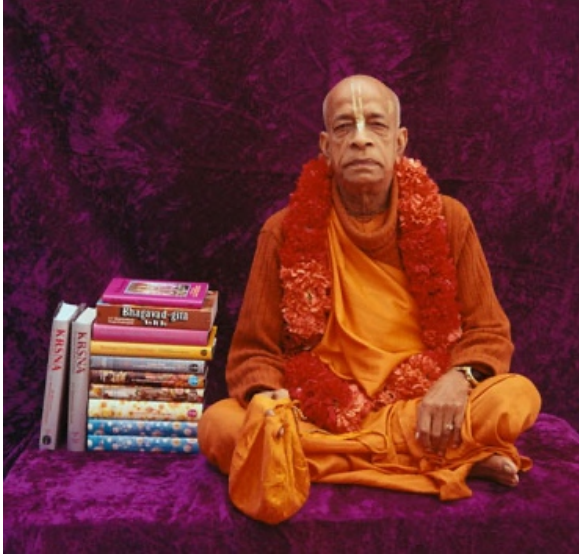
Srila Prabhupada explains that one can follow **"Vedic principles on the mundane platform,"** and that's a *smārta* characteristic, one found in Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya before Lord Caitanya converted him into a Vaisnava:



"Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya was previously a *smārta-brāhmaṇa*—that is, one who strictly follows the Vedic principles on the mundane platform. On the mundane platform one cannot believe that *prasādam* is transcendental, that Govinda is the original form of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, or that a Vaiṣṇava is a liberated person. These transcendental considerations are out of the ordinary Vedic scholar's jurisdiction."

(Cc, Madhya 12.180, purport) So, mere scholarship (such as formal Sanskrit training or study of **"material *dharma-sāstra*"**) doesn't guarantee grasping the spiritual essence; in fact, it can often be detrimental to real understanding. The issue of epistemic purity, of following the right sources (*pramana*) is so crucial that we will later dedicate a full section to it, showing how the neo-*smārtas* systematically attack the foundations of Gaudiya-vaisnavism.

"Four Works Are Sufficient"



Srila Prabhupada clearly stated: "One should not partially study a book just to pose oneself as a great scholar by being able to refer to scriptures. In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement we have therefore limited our study of the Vedic literatures to the *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. These four works are sufficient for preaching purposes. They are adequate for the understanding of the philosophy and the spreading of

missionary activities all over the world." (Cc Madhya 22.118, purport)

When the neo-*smārtas* neglect these primary sources and instead promote secondary, tertiary, and even conflicting references, the whole architecture of socio-philosophical understanding gets distorted. I am not saying that (real) scholars shouldn't study anything beyond those four books; the problem is when unqualified scholars, motivated by anti-Gaudiya feelings, focus too much on inconsequential texts at the expense of the primary Gaudiya scriptures.

In their proselytism, neo-*smārtas* often confuse and misuse the concept of *śāstra* and innocent devotees get bewildered, bedazzled, and betrayed by their display of deviant teachings sprinkled with Sanskrit and packaged as Vedicisms. The uninformed devotees may think: "Oh, these devotees say '*śāstra*' and '*śāstric*' every three words... They also speak some Sanskrit! They must be so genuinely Vedic!"

Readers should beware of external claims of fidelity to "tradition," to "*śāstra*," to "*varṇāśrama*," to "Vedic culture," etc. because these can often be misleading displays of mundane, body-centered, *apa-sampradāya* tendencies; indications of *smārta* deceit. Srila Prabhupada warns us: "when reading Vedic literature, we must take the path traversed by great *ācāryas*: *mahā-jano yena gataḥ sa panthāḥ*. [*Mahābhārata*, *Vana-pārva*, 313.117] Unless one follows the path traversed by great *ācāryas*, he cannot understand the real purport of the Vedas." (Cc Madhya, 6.147, purport)


Relative Importance & Authority of Śāstra

I am spending considerable time on this because this is the main trick of the neo-*smārtas*. They proclaim: " In the [whatever śāstra title], it is said this, that, and the other thing. How can you deny it? How can you fail to obey śāstra? That would be blasphemous!" The not-so-learned devotees, unable to dispute the references, feel intimidated, or even guilty, "Well, if it's in the śāstra, we must follow..." Thus, the neo-*smārtas* spread their caste consciousness, even though the Gaudiya *ācāryas* have been refuting their views for hundreds of years. Or the *ācāryas* might have considered their references inapplicable and therefore irrelevant.

Srila Madhvācārya explains in his *Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya*:

*vaiṣṇavāni purāṇāni pañcarātrātmakatvataḥ
pramāṇāny eva manvādyāḥ smṛtayo 'py anukūlataḥ*

"*Purāṇas* which establish the supremacy of Vishnu are authority as they convey what is stated in *Pañcarātra*. *Smṛti śāstras* like those of Manu and others are also authority so far as they are consistent with these." So, other śāstras are "conditionally" authoritative, depending on their degree of alignment with Vaisnava teachings.



What made you think that this is compatible with Gauḍīyā Vaiṣṇavism?

Well... I thought that anything with "saṁhitā" or "smṛti" in the title would be OK...

Gauḍīya guru

neo-smārta

Such & Such Samhitā

anti-smārta ≠ campaign

Śrīla Prabhupāda,
Lecture on SB 6.1.7,
Los Angeles, 10 Sept 1968:

"If you read different scripture, you will be bewildered. In one scripture it is said... but there is adjustment. If you go to the authorized person, he can adjust. But you cannot see. You see... you'll see contradiction. So *śrutayo vibhinnāḥ*."

Also, a *śāstra* might be authentic, and Srila Prabhupada may have quoted it - even multiple times - but there are limits to a literal or complete adoption. For instance, the *Parāśara-smṛiti*, another text Srila Prabhupada referred to, declares:

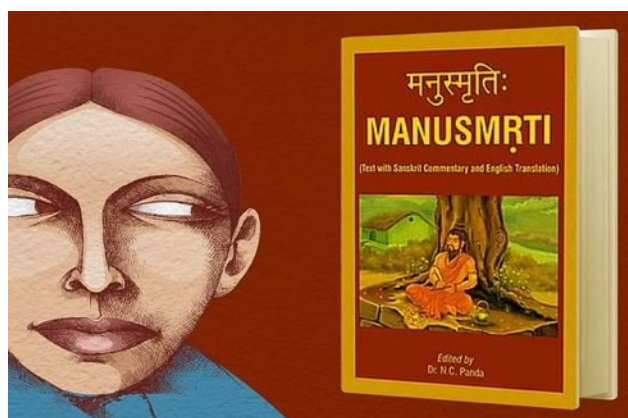
*tapaḥ param kṛta-yuge tretāyām jñānam-ucyate
dvāpare yajñam-evāhur-dānam-eva kalau-yuge*

"In Satya-yuga austerity was considered the topmost process, cultivating knowledge is said (to be the same) in Tretā-yuga; in Dvāpara-yuga (they) say sacrifices (to be) the sole (rule); and charity alone in Kali-yuga" (Ps 1.23)

Would Srila Prabhupada agree that charity should be taken as the topmost process for Kali-yuga? Should we discard or relativize all the instructions on the *yuga-dharma* for Kali-yuga, chanting the holy names, based on the above reference?

Interpolations Make Certain *Śāstra* Unreliable

Another big problem with indiscriminately quoting various texts is that some *śāstra* do not arrive to us in their pristine form. In the case of *Manu-samhita* in particular, there is broad agreement that we are not dealing with the original version.



According to Wikipedia: "[S]cholars point to the inconsistencies and have questioned the authenticity of verses, and the extent to which verses were changed, inserted or interpolated into the original, at a later date. Sinha, for example, states that less than half, or only 1,214 of the 2,685 verses in Manusmriti, may be authentic.

Further, the verses are internally inconsistent. Verses such as 3.55–3.62 of Manusmriti, for example, glorify the position of women, while verse such as 9.3 and 9.17 do the opposite. Other passages found in Manusmriti, such as those relating to Ganesh, are modern era insertions and forgeries."²

The same article reports that also Gandhi recognized the serious issues with the text: "I hold Manusmriti as part of Shastras. But that does not mean that I swear by every verse that is printed in the book described as Manusmriti. There are so many

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manusmriti>

contradictions in the printed volume that, if you accept one part, you are bound to reject those parts that are wholly inconsistent with it. ... Nobody is in possession of the original text."

In his introduction to the *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā*, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura confirms that the *Manu-saṁhitā* was interpolated with the insertion of new text, to smuggle teachings contradictory to the original message:

"The *varṇāśrama* system continued purely for a long time, until Jamadagni and his son Parashuram, of *kṣatriya* natures, claimed themselves as *brāhmaṇas*. By following a *varṇa* contrary to their nature out of self interest, they created friction between the *brāhmaṇa* and *kṣatriya* classes. Because of this seed of enmity between the two classes, the procedure of judging *varṇa* by birth became fixed. In time, this system of *varṇas* without reference to nature entered covertly in the *Manu-saṁhitā* and other scriptures."³



"And other scriptures" - Ouch!

Yes, Srila Prabhupada called the *Manu-saṁhitā*, "the lawbook for mankind," (Bg 2.21, purport) but was he referring to the present jumble of forgeries, later additions, and contradictions? Or was he talking about an original, now lost, document? In any case, Srila Prabhupada never approved or promoted the material caste system based on birth described in the *Manu-saṁhitā*. Yes, from the text he extracted and promoted certain principles useful for social sanity, but he never said that we should adopt *everything* in it.

Besides the above considerations, can the neo-*smārtas* honestly claim to possess the qualifications to study and teach *Manu-saṁhitā* according to the stipulation of the *Manu-saṁhitā* itself?

*nīṣekādi śmaśānānto mantrair yasyodito vidhiḥ
tasya śāstre'dhikāro'smiñ jñeyo nānyasya kasyacit*

"A man for whom it is prescribed that the rites beginning with the impregnation ceremony (*garbhadhana*) and ending with the funeral ceremony (*antyeṣthi*) are to

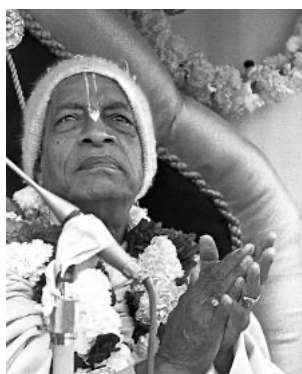
³ Quoted in the paper "[Some Evidence Regarding Education and Guruship for Vaishnavis](https://www.harekrna.com/sun/editorials/01-13/vaisnavis.pdf)" By Bhaktarupa Das and Madhavananda Das, January 2013 <https://www.harekrna.com/sun/editorials/01-13/vaisnavis.pdf>

be performed with the recitation of Vedic formulas (*mantras*) - no one but he is to be recognized as entitled to study this treatise." (MS 2.16)

Therefore, when we hear devotees declare, even if in good faith, "The *Manu-saṁhitā* says this and that," we should remain extremely cautious. Is the passage authentic or simply a later addition by people with a caste-conscious agenda, incompatible with the original spirit of the text? Is the devotee who is speaking even qualified, according to the text itself, to read it and explain it? Is the passage, even if genuine, in line with Lord Caitanya's teachings and endorsed by the *ācāryas*, or does it simply present the casteism-infused *varṇāśrama* that the Gaudiyas have condemned for centuries?

In a recent paper, for instance, the "ISKCON India Scholars Board" extensively quotes Medhātithi's commentary on the *Manu-saṁhitā*. But who is this Medhātithi? Almost nothing is known about him (some people, for instance, claim he was from Kashmir, others say that he was from South India), but everything seems to indicate that he was an expert on *karma-mīmāṃsā*, an atheistic philosophy hostile to theistic *Vedānta*. Srila Prabhupada never quotes him (but mentions another Medhātithi, a Vedic sage, a different person). How seriously can we take what this Medhātithi says? Or, even more fundamentally, should we listen to him at all?

The *Manu-saṁhitā* and other *smṛti-śāstra* clearly do not teach *daiva-varṇāśrama*, the Vaisnava application of social rules; the rules of such texts are based on caste qualifications by birth. Of course, we do not reject *all* social guidelines contained in them but only those that contradict Vaisnava principles. And let's remember that Srila Prabhupada didn't give his disciple an unconditional green light to pick and choose norms and practices from the *Manu-saṁhitā*. So, dabble with *Manu-saṁhitā* (and similar books) at your own risk:



"I discussed the contents of your letter with His Divine Grace Srila Prabhupada. Srila Prabhupada stated that our *grhasthas* should simply chant 50 rounds before conceiving a child. Prabhupada said: 'We do not want all these rituals. Chanting Hare Krishna is our only business. According to the *Manu-saṁhitā* you are all *mlecchas* and *yavanas*. You cannot touch the *Manu-saṁhitā*, what to speak of translating it. So if you try to follow the *Manu-saṁhitā* then you become a *mleccha* and *yavana* and your career is finished.'" (Letter to Madhusudana, by Tamal Krishna Gosvami, Secretary to Srila Prabhupada, 19 May 1977)

Offense Number 23

In *The Nectar of Devotion*, Chapter 8, "Offenses to Be Avoided," Srila Prabhupada lists "offenses which are mentioned in the *Varāha Purāṇa*." At number 23 we encounter: "One should not introduce any opposing scripture" (which is practically the neo-*smārtas'* national sport). Offense 23 takes two forms:

1. Quoting from scriptures whose basic tenets are opposed to Vaisnava principles. For instance, indiscriminately promoting in ISKCON the *Manu-samhita* and other *smṛti-śāstras* presenting the ordinary, birth-based social system rejected by our *ācāryas*.

2. Misinterpreting statements from scriptures, e.g.: falsifying the meaning of the *Bharadvaja-samhita*.

The injunction that "One should not introduce any opposing scripture" reminds us that not all scriptures are the same. Some are teaching ideas that are directly against Mahaprabhu's plan for the re-spiritualization of the planet. The whole neo-*smārta* enterprise is built on "Offense 23." And the mishap it's not something they stumble upon occasionally or inadvertently; it's the central drive and core temperament of their "mission."



Neo-smārtas: going south. Fast.

Going Directly Against Krishna & Srila Prabhupada

It's easy to fall into a cavalier attitude about cruising *śāstra*, without understanding their relative value and relevance. A likely result is to remain bewildered about what's what; what's to be adopted and what's to be rejected. A group of confused individuals, the "ISKCON India Scholars Board," show this kind of disorientation in their writings. I would love if ISKCON India could have a board of true and loyal scholars. I would enjoy being enriched by their insights and investigations. I would be inspired and enlightened by their faithful and learned expositions. Regrettably, the present Board suffers from three fundamental shortcomings:

1. Everything indicates that they are philosophically incompetent.
2. They are driven by neo-*smārta* attitudes.
3. They appear to "cut corners," ethically speaking; resorting, while debating their opponents' views, to cheap tricks such as attacking words never written or statements their opponents never made. A disturbing sign of a lack of intellectual integrity for a group calling themselves "scholars"...

Let me start to show how their understanding directly clashes with established authorities - in this case the Founder-*Ācārya* and Krishna (who happens to be God). In their 70-page paper "*Śrīla Prabhupāda's Authority in his Books and Other Contexts*," signed by the whole gang, they attack the concept that *the end justifies the means*; the idea of *consequentialism*, the doctrine that the morality of an action must be judged by its consequences:

"In the West," the Board writes, "there is an influential category of philosophies that come under the name of Consequentialism. Included in this group are Utilitarianism (Bentham), Consequentialism (Mill), Pragmatism (Pierce, James, Dewey), Instrumentalism (Dewey), and innumerable modern, lesser-known variants." Innocent devotees reading such a sentence may think, "Wow, these specialists really know what they are talking about! Look how they expertly list so many Western theorists!"

The Board goes on and on quoting Western academics, implying that consequentialism is (supposedly) against Vaisnavism, being simply a Western contamination (as if the value of a philosophy should be judged by geography). At one point, as an example of such Western pollution, they disapprovingly mention "the end justifies the means". Unfortunately, in their prolix, condescending, and petulant exposition they miss two "details":

1. Srila Prabhupada supports consequentialism.
2. Lord Krishna (who happens to be God) supports consequentialism.

In other words, both the Founder-*Ācārya* and the Supreme Personality of Godhead agree about the notion that the value and virtue of an action resides in its consequences, *not necessarily in the action itself*. Lord Krishna Himself explains this to Arjuna in the Karna-parva of *Mahabharata*, through a story:

"Now there was a *brāhmaṇa* named Kaushika, not very learned in scripture, who dwelled [in the forest] at the confluence of several rivers, not far from a village. 'I



must always speak the truth!' This became his vow. O Dhananjaya, he then grew famous as a speaker of truth. Then some people entered that forest out of fear of robbers. Indeed the cruel robbers followed, searching hard for them. Knowing Kaushika to speak the truth, the robbers approached him and said, 'By which path, sir, did all those people go? We ask in truth. Speak out if you know where they are. Tell us!' Thus questioned, Kaushika told them the truth: 'They are hiding in that grove full of trees, creepers and bushes.' Then the robbers found them and cruelly killed them. Thus it is heard from

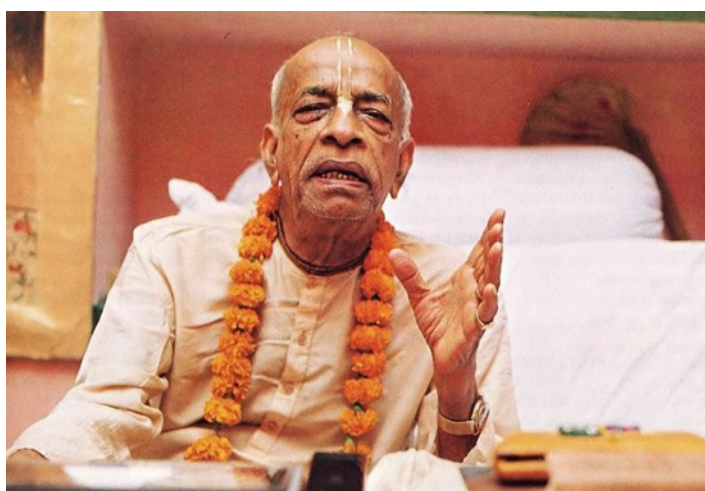
authorities. Because of that great *adharmā* of injurious speech, Kaushika went to a very painful hell, for he did not grasp the subtle principles of morality. His studies were insufficient, he was foolish, and he didn't know the divisions of *dharma*." (MB 8.49, Ganguli 8.9.70)

Krishna then proceeds to explain the purport of the story: Kaushika was superficially moral in his vow to tell the truth, but in doing so, he acted as an accessory to murder and ended in hell. Kaushika failed to grasp "Vedic consequentialism." He had placed his personal vow above the consequences of his actions and above the good of others. By following such "*dharma*" he abetted the assassins and was severely punished.

Lord Krishna establishes another principle: what's dharmic is relative to circumstances. He explains what Kaushika should have done to avoid the grievous sin: "Whenever people seek to unjustly rob someone, if that person can get free by not uttering a sound, then no sound should be uttered. Or, one should necessarily utter a sound if the robbers will be suspicious of silence. In that situation, it is considered better to speak a lie than to speak the truth." (MB 8.49.51-52) Dharmic acts may reveal adharmic if their results are counterproductive. Therefore Krishna, while of course accepting the authority of the injunctions of *śāstra*, doesn't take

them as always absolute, as indiscriminately applicable to every situation, or as automatically implementable without the use of rationality: "It is difficult to grasp the highest understanding [of morality]. One ascertains it by reasoning. Now there are many people who simply claim 'morality is scripture.' Though I don't oppose that view, scriptures do not give rules for every case." (MB 8.49.48-49)

Discounting *consequentialism* therefore represents a major demonstration of ineptitude by the "Scholars Board." What's even more astonishing is their specific condemnation of the notion that "the end justifies the means"; a sentence (and a concept) that Srila Prabhupada presented multiple times. Here I am only sharing a partial list of references:



"Ordinary men understood that Yudhisthir was compelled to visit hell because he told lie in a roundabout way, but savants could understand that he had to visit hell for the reason that he did decline to tell lie according to the order of Sree Krishna. The import of the story is that telling lie or telling truth does not

matter if it can reconcile with the Predominated End. In ordinary life also we can judge a means by the result of its end. End justifies the means. If the end is to satisfy the Great Plan of the Predominator Absolute Personality of Godhead, it does not matter whether the means are right or wrong according to the poor judgment of imperfect judges." (Back to Godhead, Vol. 1, Part 8, 1952)

"*Phalena paricīyate*, one has to study by the result. Not that superficially you show that, 'We are very much advanced.' *Phalena*: what is the result? *Phalena paricīyate*, your, that is in English word also, 'End justifies the means.'" (Lecture on Bg 3.21-25, 30 May 1966)

Prabhupāda: Our ultimate aim is to please Kṛṣṇa, the Absolute Truth. Therefore the means adopted, even if it is relative truth, that becomes Absolute Truth. The end justifies the means. Because the means is adopted, just like Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna, "Just go and tell Droṇācārya that his son is dead," although his son was not dead. So this is not truth. But because by that action Kṛṣṇa will be pleased - Kṛṣṇa is Absolute Truth - therefore even that lying is also absolute.

Śyāmasundara: So practicality has to be judged on the result, what is the result of that action?

Prabhupāda: **Yes. That is that the end justifies the means. Means is not very important. What is the end, we have to see.**

(Philosophy Discussion on William James)

So, in conclusion, there are circumstances in which the end does justify the means - if the end is worthy, such as the satisfaction of guru and Krishna. Of course, since there are unlimited combinations and permutations of *ends* and *means*, we can't take the sentence as an absolute statement, as a blanket pretext to justify *any* action. A devotee can't say: "I am going to rob a bank, and I may have to kill a few people in the process; but I will offer the money to Krishna; so it's OK." How can he think that Krishna would be pleased by such an offering, obtained through a blood-soaked crime? The principle that *the end justifies the means* must be applied cautiously and in *sattva-guna*. Nonetheless, that the notion can be misused, or that some materialistic person might have promoted it, doesn't make the idea invalid; as we have seen both Krishna and Srila Prabhupada embracing it.

What I find puzzling is that among the twelve members of the "Scholars Board" apparently nobody had the humility or wisdom to suggest, "Should we check the Vedabase or Vanipedia to see what Srila Prabhupada said about the idea that *the end justifies the means*?" Had they done that, which only takes a couple of minutes, they would have avoided the public embarrassment and the spreading of false teachings.

They would have avoided such display of philosophical incompetence. They would have concealed that, despite presenting themselves as authorities, their ideas go against the teachings of the Founder-*Ācārya* and of Lord Krishna (who happens to be God).

"The Treasonous, Demonic Threats of These People"

Let's remember that contemporary neo-*smārtas* are the spiritual successors of the people who attempted to assassinate Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura. They embody and exhibit the traditional enmity for Gaudiyas. If ISKCON doesn't surrender to their prejudices, they threaten to create a schism in Srila Prabhupada's Society.

Warning about the neo-*smārta* dangers and referring to the neo-*smārtas'* blatant disloyalty, one of the most senior gurus and *sannyasis* of the movement, someone personally trained by Srila Prabhupada, wrote:

"I sincerely believe that the fanatical opponents of Vaishnavi diksa gurus in fact faithfully represent the traditional, historical enemies of the Vaishnavas — the fanatical Smārtas. These people have harassed the true Vaishnavas for many centuries, quoting obscure, technical rules, denying the right of everyone to advance fully in Krishna consciousness, insisting that birth plays a crucial role in determining spiritual hierarchies.

"Obsessed with the bodies of other Vaishnavas, determined to lord it over those with 'inappropriate' births and bodies, these hypocrites have long been the enemies of true Vaishnavism.

"The treasonous, demonic threats of these people to shatter ISKCON in fact reveal their true identity. I understand that my strong language may not be appropriate for diplomacy and negotiation, but someone has to speak this truth."

(Email to GBC members, global ISKCON ministers and other receivers, 10 Jan 2023)

The neo-*smārtas* have been unwilling to cooperate. As Maharaja Pariksit allowed Kali some places to live, the GBC offered special concessions for those recalcitrant to submit to the traditional, accepted standards of Gaudiya-vaisnavism in relation to women *diksa-gurus*. But the neo-*smārtas* weren't satisfied. They wanted their influence and inflexibility to dominate *the whole world*. Threatening a schism, the neo-*smārta* have been menacing to rip Srila Prabhupada's movement apart if their views aren't accepted.

"It became necessary to destroy the town to save it." These words, attributed to a US officer, became emblematic of the Vietnam war (1955-1975). The unsettling, paradoxical attitude expressed by the quote resembles the approach of the neo-*smārtas*. For them, their *apa-sampradāya* doctrines, their pseudo-Vedicism, their caste-consciousness, and their neurotic *dharma-śāstrism* represent the uncompromisable "values" that they must impose on ISKCON. Some neo-*smārtas* appear to think that, should ISKCON resist, it would become "necessary to destroy ISKCON to save it - to save it from Gaudiya-vaisnavism."





As such threats are so serious and the dangers of a schism so real, I believe it worthwhile to look at the past; to explore the historical roots and examples of the clash between *smārtas* and Gaudiya-vaisnavas - while noting the parallels with the present.

If a schism were to take place in ISKCON, which side would you join? Would you go with the neo-smārtas or stay with the "Gaudiya-side"?

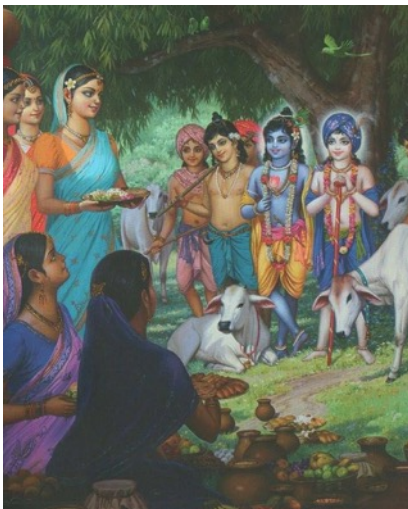
The Long History of Conflict & Uneasy Co-existence

Today we are witnessing how neo-*smārtas* are attempting at adulterating our movement, especially in India, but this is not the first time that the *smārtas* have opposed the *sankirtana* movement or Vaisnavism in general.

The *Dvija-patnīs* and Their *Smārta* Husbands

We can observe the tension between wholesome Krishna consciousness and *smārta* attitudes in the Krishna Book chapter entitled *Delivering the Wives of the Brahmanas who Performed Sacrifices*. Srila Prabhupada calls those ritualistic performers "*smārta-brāhmaṇas*." The episode draws to the timeless mentality of privilege, entitlement, and caste-consciousness. But the wives of those *brāhmaṇas* went straight for the quintessence of *dharma*. The setting: the cowherd boys go to ask for food for Krishna and Balarama to the *brāhmaṇas*, who ignore them.

“Although the companions of Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma were simple cowherd boys, they were in a position to dictate even to the high-class *brāhmaṇas* engaged in the Vedic rituals of sacrifice. But the *smārta-brāhmaṇas*, who were simply sacrificial-minded, could not understand the dictation of the transcendental devotees of the Lord . . . Despite being highly elevated in the knowledge of Vedic sacrificial rites, all such nondevotee *brāhmaṇas*, although they think of themselves as very highly elevated, are ignorant, foolish persons. All their activities are childish because they do not know the purpose of the *Vedas*.” (*Krishna Book*, Ch. 23)



The wives of those *brāhmaṇas*, the celebrated *dvija-patnīs*, represent the mood of pure devotional service, the capacity to immediately grasp the identity and value of Krishna, Balarama, and Their associates (who superficially appeared of a "lower caste"). They enthusiastically rushed to bring food to Krishna. History repeats itself: as the *smārta-brāhmaṇas* in Vraja felt themselves "too Vedic" to entertain the request of Krishna's friends, modern neo-*smārtas* act as "more Catholic than the Pope." On the pretext of promoting

"Vedic culture" they sideline and underestimate the path of pure *bhakti* and overemphasize the bodily platform.

Smārta Bashing in the Gita

Years later, speaking the Gita at Kuruksetra, Lord Krishna unceremoniously branded such *smārta* ritualists as *veda-vāda-ratāḥ* - the "supposed followers of the Vedas" (Bg 2.42.43, word-by-word translation). This epithet aptly captures one of the defining characteristics of *smārtas* (and neo-*smārtas*): they are "Vedic" in name only, missing the essence of Vedic knowledge and loosing



themselves in externals. In fact, a friend of mine suggested that the neo-*smārtas* should also be addressed as *veda-vāda-ratāḥ*, and Srila Prabhupada's words confirm that the mentality is the same:

"You will find, there are many *brāhmiṇs*, they are *smārtas*. They are called *smārta*, means they are under conclusion that 'If we do nice Vedic... perform nice Vedic rituals, then our duty is finished.'" (Lecture on SB 6.3.12-15, Gorakhpur, 4 Feb 1971) Srila Prabhupada also writes: "Indeed, there is a group of men in India who are very fond of the Vedic rituals, not understanding the meaning of these rituals." (SB 6.3.19, purport)

There are devotees who say "Vedic" every three words but completely miss the point. Krishna is the goal of Vedic culture, and Krishna appears as Lord Caitanya, who teaches us how to be Vedic in Kali-yuga, which involves relativizing the social trimmings suitable for previous ages and discarding the calcified stratifications of caste-consciousness. Neo-*smārtas* fervently push ISKCON towards anachronistic and counterproductive customs that would be detrimental to the devotees' spiritual growth (and that would make ISKCON irrelevant and ineffective).

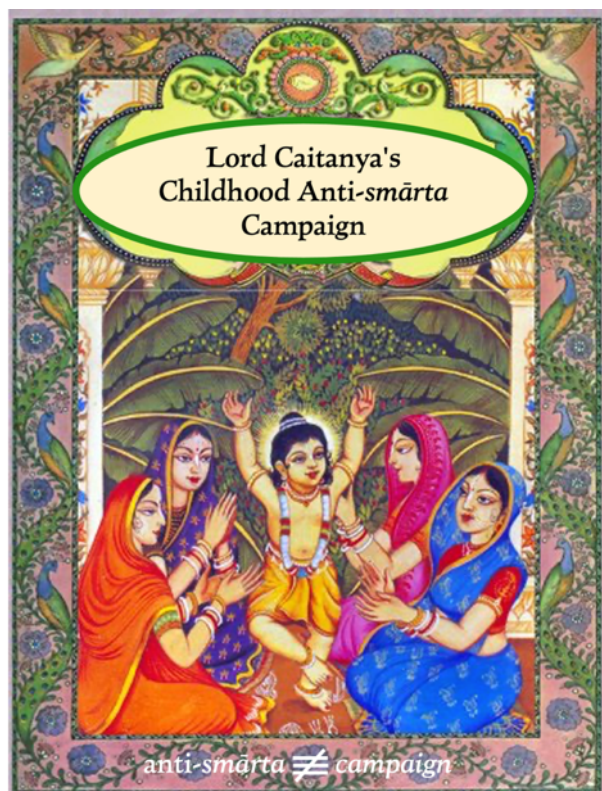
Srila Prabhupada is clear: "One cannot understand Vedic knowledge from the *veda-vāda-ratās*, who read the *Vedas* and misconstrue their subject matter." (SB 8.24.61, purport) Similarly, one cannot understand the proper, contemporary application of Vedic culture from those who discard Srila Prabhupada's mood and mission.

Prabhupada also writes: "The *veda-vāda-ratas* give their own explanations of the Vedas, neglecting the authority of great teachers (*ācāryas*). They also tend to raise some unscrupulous person from among themselves and present him as the leading exponent of Vedic knowledge." (*Sri Isopanisad*, Mantra 9, purport) I am not sure whom did he have in mind, but this statement reminds me of the "ISKCON India Scholars Board," who present themselves as authorities in Vedic sociology while vilifying the social principles of Gaudiya-vaisnavism.

In the same *Isopanisad* purport Srila Prabhupada describes another salient feature of neo-*smārtas*: "Such *veda-vāda-ratas* search out meanings in every word of the *Vedas* to suit their own purposes." Almost daily we are witnessing this cherry picking.

"In *Bhagavad-gītā*, such people are described as *veda-vāda-ratā*. They do not understand the real purpose of the Vedas, yet they think of themselves as Vedic authorities." (Cc Madhya 17.185, purport) Another uncanny statement evocative of our "friends."

Lord Caitanya's Childhood Anti-*smārta* Campaign



When Krishna came again as Lord Caitanya and established His spiritually egalitarian approach to *bhakti*, the *smārtas* naturally resented it, His message being incompatible with their prejudices. Lord Caitanya's inclusivity has been a challenge to their social status, a lethal blow to their ego, and even a threat to their livelihood. Lord Caitanya had to address *smārta* superstitions even as a child, in his own family, in connection with something as routine, for a *brāhmaṇa* household, as the norms for following Ekādaśī. The chapter *The Lord's Paugaṇḍa-līlā*, from *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Ādi-līlā*, narrates

Mahaprabhu's activities between the age of five and ten and includes the following exchange:

"One day Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu fell down at the feet of His mother and requested her to give Him one thing in charity. His mother replied, 'My dear son, I will give You whatever You ask.' Then the Lord said, 'My dear mother, please do not eat grains on the Ekādaśī day.' Mother Śācī said, 'You have spoken very nicely. I shall not eat grains on Ekādaśī.' From that day, she began to observe fasting on Ekādaśī." (Cc Ādi 15.8-10)



Srila Prabhupada elaborates: "From the very beginning of His childhood life Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu introduced the system of observing a fast on the Ekādaśī day . . . It is a prejudice among *smārta-brāhmaṇas* that a widow must observe fasting on Ekādaśī but a woman who is *sa-dhava* — who has her husband — should not . . . Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, however, introduced the system that a woman, even if not a widow, must observe the Ekādaśī day and must not touch any kind of grains, even those offered to the Deity of Viṣṇu." (Cc, Ādi, 15.9-10, purport)

I don't wish to extrapolate too much from this episode, but I believe this interaction between Gaura Hari and Śācī Devi illustrates a broader principle, over and above the rules for Ekādaśī. *Smārtas* and Gaudiya have traditionally clashed in connection with differing conceptions of *strī-dharma*, the role and duty of women. Here Mahaprabhu precociously starts debunking and dismantling the *smārta* mundane bias (Srila Prabhupada calls "a prejudice" the norm that non-widows need not follow Ekādaśī). Here Lord Caitanya, still a child, heralds a classic Gaudiya-vaisnava feature: women are not intended or expected to simply remain as assistants and spectators of male religious performances, vicariously benefiting from their husbands' rites. Gaudiya Vaisnavis can't simply delegate their spiritual advancement to their husbands' sacramental procedures. No, they are required to directly involve themselves fully and individually in devotional practices. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, for instance, exemplified and applied the principle by initiating women married to non-devotee husbands and by initiating unmarried girls who had no certainty of later marrying a devotee husband.

Srila Prabhupada clearly considered and declared second-initiated and unmarried women as full-fledged *dvijas*, twice-born *brāhmaṇas*, regardless of their present or future marital status. In ISKCON therefore married or unmarried women take the

same vows of initiation as men. Neo-*smārtas* are attacking this principle, going directly against the instructions and standards established by the Founder-*Ācārya*. Having a favorable male partner certainly helps and it's recommended, but an initiated woman can't just "deputize" fasting from grains on Ekādaśī to her husband.

The *Smārtas* Try to Sabotage the Lord's Mission

In general, while in Mayapur Lord Caitanya left the *smārtas* to their own devices. Srila Prabhupada writes:

“At that time there were many *smārtas* (nondevotee followers of Vedic rituals) at the holy place of Navadvīpa, which was also the birthplace of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Followers of the *smṛti-śāstra* are called *smārtas*. Most of them are nondevotees, and their main business is following the brahminical principles strictly. However, they are not enlightened in devotional service. In Navadvīpa all the learned scholars are followers of the *smṛti-śāstra*, and Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu did not attempt to convert them.” (Cc *Madhya*, 7.109, purport)

Even though Lord Caitanya didn't directly target His evangelization at them, the *smārtas* resented His success and tried to interfere with His mission. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura writes:

"Mahāprabhu preached His principles not only in Nadia but in all the important towns and villages around His city. In the houses of His followers He showed miracles, taught the esoteric principles of *bhakti* and sang His *saikīrtana* with other bhaktas . . . This created a sensation and roused different feelings in different quarters. The *bhaktas* were highly pleased. The *smārta brāhmaṇas* became jealous of Nimāi Paṇḍita's success and complained to Chand Kazi against the character of Caitanya, claiming it was un-Hindu." (*Teachings of Lord Caitanya*, Prologue)



In the *Bhāgavatam*, Srila Prabhupada reports the same incident; explaining how the hostility of the *smārtas* persisted through history: "The *brāhmaṇas*, the priests, have been against this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement since it began with Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu . . . Caitanya Mahāprabhu had to lead a civil disobedience movement

against the propaganda of the so-called followers of Vedic principles." (SB 4.29.57, purport)



We witness a similar phenomenon today: ISKCON neo-*smārtas* go outside the *sampradāya*, to non-Gaudiya *brāhmaṇas*, to lodge complaints against the Gaudiya-vaisnava tradition in connection with the role of women. *Smārta* dynamics perpetuate themselves. In the sixteen century the Navadvipa *smārtas* complained to a Muslim magistrate; the twenty-first century neo-*smārtas* complain to outsiders (such as Ramanujas and Madhvas). The spirit of defiance against Mahāprabhu's movement is the same.

What would a Muslim magistrate know about the intricacies of proper Hindu religious performances? What sociological guidance can non-Gaudiyas offer to the followers of Lord Caitanya? In either case - by the *smārtas* or by the neo-*smārtas* - the move is political, aiming at garnering support for their prejudices, either against public chanting or against women. History repeats itself: *smārtas* squirm when they see pure Caitanya-vaisnavism in action and try to create hurdles.

Lord Caitanya encountered the *smārtas* also outside of Mayapur. The following episode happens on the banks of the Godavari, in today's Andhra Pradesh:

"Rāmānanda Rāya, he was accompanied by very, very learned men, learned *brāhmaṇas* . . . when he met Caitanya Mahāprabhu and both of them embraced and were crying in ecstasy, the *brāhmiṇs*, the *smārta-brāhmiṇs*, they could not understand that, 'Why this great personality, governor...? He is so great, and simply by embracing a *sannyāsī* he is crying. And why this *sannyāsī* - it is understood that He is coming from a *brāhmiṇ* family . . . Why He is crying by



embracing Rāmānanda?' They could not understand . . . So, the *smārtas*, they cannot understand." (Lecture on SB 6.3.12-15, Gorakhpur, 4 Feb 1971)

"They cannot understand." What a sad verdict. What a depressing legacy. Even if the Lord is in their midst, manifesting His sweetness and bliss, "they cannot understand."

Lord Caitanya is the most magnanimous *avatara*, but He disowned the *smārtas*: "although the *bāula-sampradāya*, *āula-sampradāya* and *sahajiyā-sampradāya*, as well as the *smārtas*, *jāta-gosānis*, *ativāḍīs*, *cūḍādhārīs* and *gaurāṅga-nāgarīs*, claim to belong to the disciplic succession of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the Lord actually rejected them." (Cc Adi 12.36, purport)

The *Apa-sampradāyas* Ruin the Movement

After Lord Caitanya completed His manifested pastimes, dangerous pseudo-followers adulterated the *sankirtana* movement: "Unfortunately, after the disappearance of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu, many *apa-sampradāyas* (so-called followers) invented many ways not approved by the *ācāryas*. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has described them as the *āula*, *bāula*, *kartābhajā*, *neḍā*, *daraveśa*, *sāni*, *sahajiyā*, *sakhībhekī*, *smārta*, *jāta-gosāni*, *ativāḍī*, *cūḍādhārī* and *gaurāṅga-nāgarī*." (Cc *Madhya* 1.271, purport)

In the last chapter of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura's *Hari-nama-cintamani*, Lord Caitanya prophesizes to Haridasa Thakura that, after His departure, *visva andhakara karibeka dustajane*, "the sinful wicked people will spread darkness and ignorance in this world." Since at least the time of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, the Gaudiya *ācāryas*, have listed the *smārtas* as one of the *apa-sampradāyas*, the deviated pretenders who claim to follow Sri Caitanya:

"There are many unauthorized parties pretending to belong to the Śrī Caitanya cult, and some are known as *āula*, *bāula*, *kartābhajā*, *neḍā*, *daraveśa*, *sāni*, *sahajiyā*, *sakhībhekī*, *smārta*, *jāta-gosāni*, *ativāḍī*, *cūḍādhārī* and *gaurāṅga-nāgarī* . . . There are also nondevotees . . . who accept caste brahmanism as all in all, and who do not know the value of a pure Vaiṣṇava." (Cc *Madhya* 8.83, purport)

Srila Prabhupada warns: "In order to follow strictly the disciplic succession of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu, one should not associate with these *apasampradāya* communities." (Cc *Adi* 7.48, purport) What to speak of offering them prestigious positions within ISKCON...

The Delicate Dance of Coexistence

Despite the *smārta apa-sampradāya* being rejected by Lord Caitanya, the genuine Vaisnavas had to interact with some of these group, especially with the *smārtas* and the caste Goswamis (*jāta-gosāni*), who enjoyed widespread social acceptance and held a stranglehold on Indian religiosity, almost a monopoly. To prevent being ostracized and to facilitate the broader society to acknowledge their legitimacy, in some case Vaisnava leaders externally aligned with some of the *smārta* practices.



This reminds me of how in Bali, Indonesia, during public, formal programs such as Ratha-yatra, ISKCON devotees *must* wear the local, traditional headgear (a sort of mini-turban or head-wrap). Don't ask me why, but the local Hindu culture strictly *demands* it.

Lord Caitanya instructed his disciples to write authoritative, canonical books for His followers. Due to the cultural climate of the times, what they compiled in some cases had to appear consistent with *smārta* conventions.

Srila Prabhupada writes: "Sanātana Gosvāmī wrote his Vaiṣṇava *smṛti*, *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, which was specifically meant for India. In those days, India was more or less following the principle of *smārta-vidhi*. Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī had to keep pace with this, and his *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* was compiled with this in mind." (Cc *Madhya* 23.105, purport)



The same idea expressed in different words: "*Smārta-pañḍita*; very serious about performing ceremonial rituals, they are called *smārtas*. This *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* also, *Vaiṣṇava-smṛti*, that is also imitation of *smārtaism*." (Conversation, London, 16 July 1973)

The discreet pirouette between simultaneous rejection of the *smārta* and resonance with some of their procedures had to be performed if pure Gaudiya-vaisnavism were to be recognized as authentic by the literati and intelligentsia of India. At the same time, of course, in their work the Gaudiya-*ācāryas* taught the principles of *bhakti*, even if clashing with *smārta* preconceptions:

"According to *smārta-brāhmaṇas*, a person not born in a *brāhmaṇa* family could not be elevated to the position of a *brāhmaṇa*. Sanātana Gosvāmī, however, says in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (2.12) that anyone can be elevated to the position of a *brāhmaṇa* by the process of initiation.

*yathā kāncanatām yāti
kāṁsyaṁ rasa-vidhānataḥ
tathā dīkṣā-vidhānena
dvijatvaṁ jāyate nṛṇām*

'As bell metal is turned to gold when mixed with mercury in an alchemical process, so one who is properly trained and initiated by a bona fide spiritual master immediately becomes a *brāhmaṇa*.'" (Cc *Madhya* 23.105, purport) Today neo-*smārtas* frantically clamor against this principle, stating that it doesn't apply to half of humanity - the half with two X chromosomes. (More on this later.)

Gaudiya leaders were encircled by *smārta* attitudes and had to take their mood into consideration in their presentations; without compromising their message, but knowing that they were watching. For instance, Krishnadas Kaviraja Goswami knew that some of his readers would be affected by *smārta* views. Srila Prabhupada writes:

"The author of *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* . . . says, 'Let the neophyte devotees—the devotees who are very expert in arguing though they have no sense of advanced devotional service, who think themselves very advanced because they imitate some *smārta-brāhmaṇa*—let such devotees not be displeased with me . . . I have only written what I have heard in the disciplic succession.'" (Cc *Madhya* 2.93)

Krishnadas Kaviraja Goswami had to deal with "neophyte devotees" who "imitate some *smārta-brāhmaṇa*" and argue endlessly. Similarly, today ISKCON must deal with the neo-*smārtas*, who also argue *e - n - d - l - e - s - s - l - y*.

When the *Smārtas* Directly Infiltrated Our *Sampradāya*

Besides the tricky but unavoidable cohabitation between Gaudiyas and *smārtas* described above, in the sixteenth century a section of *smārtas* formally merged with the pure followers of Mahaprabhu, carrying with them their *apa-sampradāya* baggage. Suhotra Maharaja narrates the story in his book *Thirteen Apasampradayas*:

"These *apasampradayas* (*apa* means 'deviated') are like parasitical growths upon the great tree of the *sankirtan* movement . . . There are many traits the *smārtas* share with the *jata-gosani*. This is because the *jata-gosani* lost their vaishnava qualifications by slipping back into upper-caste pride or *upadhi-bhuta* (acceptance of false designation) . . . Coming under *smārta* influence, the descendants of these families gradually revived caste rules and taboos from the *smṛti-sāstras* in order to assert their supposed congenital superiority over other communities . . .



"In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries A.D., the importance of the Bengali *smārta* community was practically nullified by Lord Caitanya's *sankirtan* movement. Among the great vaishnava-*ācāryas* of that period, Srila Narottama dasa Thakur stands out as the preacher who most cut down their pride. The *smārtas*, considering him just a low-born *kayastha*, became so infuriated at his making disciples from among their ranks that they enlisted the king, Raja Narasimha, and a conquering pandit named Sri Rupanarayana, to lead a crusade to somehow expose Acarya Thakur as a fraud.

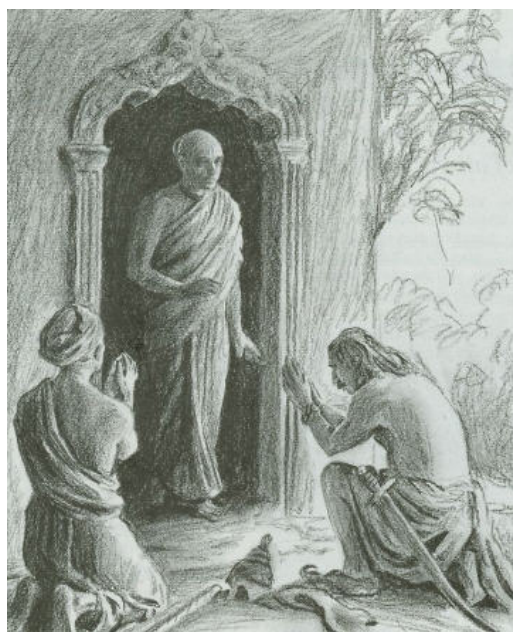
"The king, the pandit and a large party of caste *brāhmaṇas* made their way to Kheturi, where Srila Narottama das had his headquarters. When Sri Ramacandra Kaviraja and Sri Ganga Narayana Cakravarti, two vaishnava *brāhmaṇas*, came to know of the *smārta* conspiracy, they disguised themselves as *śūdras* and set up two small shops in the Kumarapura market: one a pan and betel nut shop and the other a store selling clay pots. As the party arrived at Kumarapura, the *smārtas* sent their disciples to the market to purchase wares for cooking. When the students came to the shops of Ramacandra and Ganga Narayana, they were dumfounded to find that these '*wallas*' spoke perfect Sanskrit and were eager not to do business but to engage in philosophical disputation. Finding themselves outmatched, the distressed

students called for their gurus, who arrived on the scene with Raja Narasimha and Rupanarayana. When the *smārtas* fared no better than their disciples, Rupanarayana himself was drawn into the debate and soundly defeated.

"When the king demanded they introduce themselves, the two shopkeepers humbly submitted that they were low-born and insignificant disciples of Srila Narottama das Thakur Mahasaya. Smarting in shame, Rupanarayana and the *smārta-brāhmaṇas* lost interest in proceeding to Kheturi. They all decided to return immediately to their respective homes.

"That night at home, Raja Narasimha had a dream in which an angry Durga-devi threatened him with a chopper used for killing goats. Glaring at him with blazing eyes, the goddess said, 'Narasimha! Because you greatly offended Narottama das Thakur, I shall have to cut you to pieces! If you want to save yourself, then you had better immediately go and take shelter at his lotus feet.' Frightened out of his wits, his sleep broken, the king quickly took bath and set out for Kheturi. When at last he arrived, he was surprised to meet the pandita Rupanarayana, who sheepishly explained that he'd had a similar dream. They both entered the temple of Sri Gauranga in order to meet Srila Narottama das Thakur.

"Acarya Thakur was absorbed in his *bhajana*, but when a disciple informed him of the arrival of the two guests, he came out to meet them. Simply by seeing his transcendental form, the two offenders became purified and fell down to offer their obeisances at the Thakur's lotus feet. Finally he initiated them with Radha-Krishna mantra. Because their leaders became vaishnavas, many lesser *smārtas* thought it prudent to externally adopt vaishnava customs. This is how the *smārta-apasampradaya*, or Vaishnavism compromised by caste brahmanism, began."



Vaisnava historians will report how, after Srila Prabhupada disappearance, ISKCON experienced the intense neo-*smārta* propaganda we witness today. The end of that chapter isn't written yet. Do the neo-*smārta* win, turning ISKCON into some sort of Talibanic Vaisnavism? Or ISKCON leaders take a firm stand, quelling the neo-*smārta* agitation and restoring sanity to Srila Prabhupada's Society?

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura's Exposes the *Smārtas*; They Try to Murder Him

In previous centuries the Gaudiya savants had managed a precarious coexistence, a skilled dance for keeping some degree of harmony or non-belligerence with the dominant *smārta* culture - a strategy followed up to and including the time of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura - but with Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura the tension became open antagonism, a frontal collision. He uncompromisingly and unceremoniously dumped any collaborationism. Srila Prabhupada describes:

"So my Guru Mahārāja's contribution is that he defeated these caste *gosvāmīs*. He defeated this brahmanism," The intensity of the confrontation reaching its climax with their attempt to assassinate him. "They conspired to kill him." Srila Prabhupada continues, "Guru Mahārāja told me personally . . . that 'These people, they wanted to kill me. They collected 25,000 rupee and went to bribe the police officer in charge of that area that, 'You take these 25,000 rupees. We shall do something against Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. You don't take any step.' He could understand that they want to kill him . . . So the police officer frankly said: 'Of course, we accept bribe, and we indulge in such things, but not for a *sādhu*, not for a saintly person. I cannot dare this.' And the police officer refused and came to my Guru Mahārāja that 'You take care. This is the position.' You see? So vehemently protested." (Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura's Appearance Lecture, Los Angeles, 7 Feb 1969)



How I wish that Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura were with us today! He would “mercilessly” trounce and thrash the neo-*smārtas*.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura was dynamically establishing *daiva-varṇāśrama*: anyone could practice pure *bhakti*; anyone could join Lord Caitanya's movement. But he took it a step further: if you are a serious Vaisnava then you are already qualified as a *brāhmaṇa*. He would give the sacred thread to non-born *brāhmaṇas* and the *smārtas* hated it!

He was also preaching against the idea of charging a fee to see the Deities. The caste *brāhmaṇas* became so angry at him that when his *parikrama* party reached Navadvipa, their goons started throwing boulders and bricks from the rooftops, trying to kill him. At that time one of his disciples (who later became Bhakti-prajna Kesava Maharaja) pulled Sarasvati Thakura inside a house and exchanged his white cloth with his saffron robes; then others smuggled Sarasvati Thakura out and away.

Such episodes made his followers remember the prophecy of the *Varaha Purana*: *raksasah kalim asritya jayante brahma yonisu* "In the age of Kali, *raksasas* will take birth in *brāhmaṇa* families." It would be puerile naïveté to expect that such malicious "*brāhmaṇas*" would not take birth within or join our Society. It would be childish to believe that ISKCON would remain magically impervious to *raksasa*-like, virulent misleaders.

Srila Prabhupada: More Tensions & Conflict



After Sarasvati Thakura, the anti-*smārta* mantle came on the shoulders of his disciples. Among them, the one who made most noise, whose work was most indigestible for the *smārtas*, was ISKCON's Founder-*Ācārya*. They didn't like, for instance, that he, on behalf of Caitanya Mahaprabhu, brought foreigners to open and administer temples in India. Following in the footsteps of the Goswamis, Srila Prabhupada publicly dealt tactfully with the *smārtas*, as the following exchange shows:

Prabhupāda: We see there is indirect indifference with our temple. Did you mark it? The high-class Hindus, they do not very much appreciate . . . our temples . . . Because it is managed by the Americans . . .

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: I've noticed in Bengal, the aristocratic Bengalis, they come to our temple . . .

They're not *smārta*, not like that.

Prabhupāda: And these other countries, they are *smārta*.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: South, South Indian.

Prabhupāda: Yes, South . . . in Vrindavana also . . .

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: They appreciate. Or they don't?

Prabhupāda: No, not appreciate.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Yeah, they're a little standoffish.

Prabhupāda: They're envious.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: You tried to placate them by inviting all those *brāhmaṇas* for the installation ceremony [in Vrindavana] . . . But still, they were not placated.

Prabhupāda: Now we do not care for them. Our temple is now crowded. That is in beginning, just to show that we are going through real ritualistic... I spent ten thousand rupees on that performance just to make a show.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: They charged ten thousand rupees?

Prabhupāda: Yes. What can I do?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: (chuckling) It was a good show.

Prabhupāda: If I do with our men, then it will not be recognized as temple.

(Conversation, Bombay, 22 April 1977)



The Vrindavana event mentioned above (and, by the way, at that time 10,000 rupees were worth much, much more than today) provides another example of the relational ballet taking place for centuries between Vaisnavas and *smārtas*, the delicate balancing act between open confrontation and some degree of collaboration. In the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* Srila Prabhupada talks about the same episode, about his conciliatory effort with the Vrindavana *smārtas* for social acceptance, at the time of inaugurating the Krishna-Balarama temple:

"Since one may easily achieve the highest success by chanting the holy name of the Lord, one may ask why there are so many Vedic ritualistic ceremonies and why people are attracted to them . . . Unfortunately, unintelligent people bewildered by the grandeur of Vedic *yajnas* want to see gorgeous sacrifices performed. They want Vedic mantras chanted and huge amounts of money spent for such ceremonies. Sometimes we have to observe the Vedic ritualistic ceremonies to please such unintelligent men. Recently, when we established a large Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma temple in Vṛndāvana, we were obliged to have Vedic ceremonies enacted by *brāhmaṇas*

because the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana, especially the *smārta-brāhmaṇas*, would not accept Europeans and Americans as bona fide *brāhmaṇas*. Thus we had to engage *brāhmaṇas* to perform costly *yajnas*. In spite of these *yajnas*, the members of our Society performed *saṅkīrtana* loudly with *mṛdaṅgas*, and I considered the *saṅkīrtana* more important than the Vedic ritualistic ceremonies. Both the ceremonies and the *saṅkīrtana* were going on simultaneously. The ceremonies were meant for persons interested in Vedic rituals for elevation to heavenly planets (*jaḍī-kr̥ta-matir madhu-puṣpitāyām*), whereas the *saṅkīrtana* was meant for pure devotees interested in pleasing the Supreme Personality of Godhead. We would simply have performed *saṅkīrtana*, but then the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana would not have taken the installation ceremony seriously." (SB 6.3.25, purport)



(I can't prove it, but Srila Prabhupada offering the first *arati* to Krishna-Balarama wearing a full *kurta* appears to me like a slap in the face of the *smārtas*, so fussy about norms such as not using sewn cloths during worship. This hypothesis makes the photos from that *arati* even more relishable.)

In the above purport Srila Prabhupada reveals some fundamental points of divergence between the pure Vaisnava spirit and the *smārta* mindset. Pure followers of Mahaprabhu develop firm faith that the holy name possesses all the powers of God. They confide in the cleansing power of the holy name. They trust that it's the chanting that makes everything perfect. The *smārtas* are psychologically stuck, dependent on formulaic formalities, ritualistic performances, ceremonial displays, birth considerations and gender discriminations. They miss the essence (Krishna) and idealize and idolize the external form over the substance; they venerate the superfluous. *Smārtas* and neo-*smārtas* alike fail to recognize the redeeming power of the holy name, the transformative power of pure *bhakti*; and this doesn't apply only to the *smārtas* of Vrindavana: "Just like we have

no ritualistic ceremony, we have simply devotional service." Srila Prabhupada says, "We have no ritualistic ceremony. There are so many things ritualistic. And we are performing only this Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, *mahā-mantra*. Therefore the *smārta-brāhmaṇas*, they misunderstand. They do not admit that they [the ISKCON devotees] have become elevated. The Jagannātha temple does not allow." (Conversation, Tehran 10 Aug 1976)

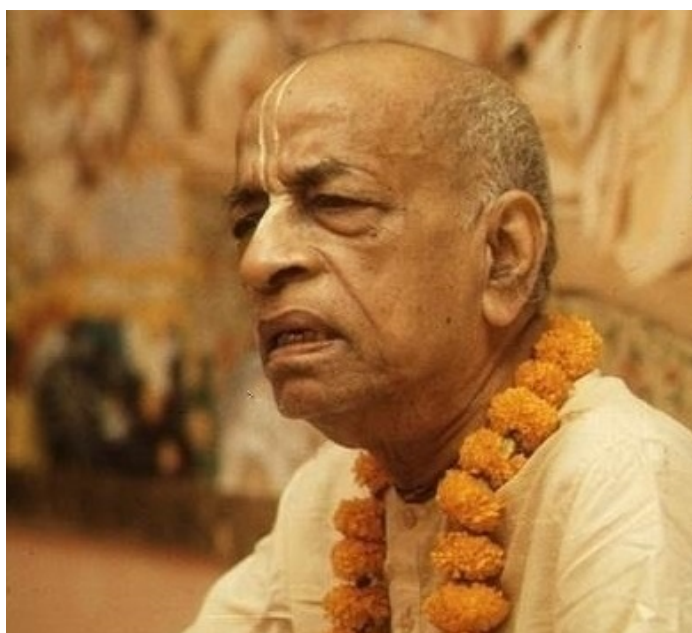


Srila Prabhupada had to deal with such oppositions throughout his missionary efforts in India, having inherited a tug of war going on for "a very long time":

"Caitanya Mahāprabhu is not liked by the hereditary brahmins. They dislike. Whenever there is Caitanya

movement, they pose another counter. This Ramakrishna is a counteraction of Caitanya. Because Caitanya, the Vaiṣṇava-*sampradāya*, accept Caitanya Mahāprabhu as incarnation of God, so they presented this Gadādhara Chatterjee as incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, and by worshiping Kālī. You see? So this competition is since a very long time between the Vaiṣṇava and the other sect." (Lecture, Los Angeles, 7 Feb 1969)

And here we are, in the third decade of the twenty-first century, with the ideas of "the other sect" having aggressively infiltrated ISKCON. Imagine Srila Prabhupada's pain and aggravation in seeing the situation; so much caste-consciousness and *smārta* propaganda being so blatantly broadcasted - by his own disciples and grand-disciples. What an embarrassment.



Misusing & Misclassifying *Śāstra*

"Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura says, *sādhu-śāstra-guru-vākya, cittete kariyā aikya*. One should accept a thing as genuine by studying the words of saintly people, the spiritual master and *śāstra*. The actual center is *śāstra*, the revealed scripture. If a spiritual master does not speak according to revealed scripture, he is not to be accepted. Similarly, if a saintly person does not speak according to the *śāstra*, he is not a saintly person. *Śāstra* is the center for all." (Cc Madhya, 20.352, purport)

A typical neo-*smārta* chicanery is to mis-categorize *śāstras*. When the *śāstras*, the center, are misinterpreted, or when we place unsuitable *śāstras* in the center, our Society gets misaligned and disoriented. To defend ISKCON it's essential to understand the neo-*smārta* trickeries. A prominent one is to indiscriminately quote any *śāstra* as if all *śāstra* had the same authority and relevance for Gaudiya-vaisnavas - which they don't.

Not all *śāstra* are written for the same audience or from the same level of realization; and not all support Mahāprabhu's radical, revolutionary Vedic message. Just like we accept the eighteen Puranas as bona fide, but we don't subscribe to all the conclusions of the Puranas written for those in *tamo-guna*, such as the Siva- or Skanda Puranas. Let's be clear on this point: quoting *śāstra* - any *śāstra* - doesn't necessarily establish ideas compatible with Gaudiya-vaisnavism.

Śāstra: Trotting or Galloping?

Srīla Jiva Goswami says that Sanskrit words are like horses proceeding with different gaits (walking, trotting, cantering, and galloping). Why? Because *the same word*, depending on the context and on the intention of the writer, may indicate different meanings. For instance, "*puruṣa*" may indicate an ordinary soul or the Supreme Person. We find a similar dynamic in English, in which, for example, the word "Lord" may refer to an English nobleman, or, in its highest connotation, to God. "*Puruṣa*" would be like a walking horse when describing a soul; and would be galloping at top speed when indicating Krishna.

Extending the analogy, *śāstras* can also be compared with horses. Although still designated as "*śāstra*," some texts are merely manuals of ethical conduct, such as Canakya's *Niti-śāstra*. Useful for civilized behavior, but hardly comparable in spiritual potency with *śāstra* such as the *Gita* or the *Bhagavatam*. Some *śāstra* are basically handbooks for cultured material enjoyment:

Prabhupāda: **The whole civilization is based on how to enjoy sex very nicely. This is their basic principle of civilization.**

Brahmānanda: Always on the best-seller charts of the books there is always some book about how to enjoy sex.

Prabhupāda: **Just see. There are books here also, *kāma-śāstra*.**

(Morning Walk, Vrindavana, 6 Sept 1975)

We can't equate such texts with, say, *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita*, which teaches about the apex of love of God. And so we enter a jungle - or, if you prefer, an ocean - of samhitas, Upanisads, vedangas, upavedas, Puranas, *dharmā-śāstras*, *tantras*, and so on. In some cases, there is no agreement even on the *number* of texts in a particular category. Wikipedia *uvaca*: "There are many Dharmashastras, variously estimated to be 18 to about 100" (which is a big difference). And then there are the books of the Gaudiya-*ācāryas* (more than one hundred titles are attributed just to Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura). Obviously, within this multitude of references there is hierarchy of value and applicability.



Classifications of relevance can also be flexible, according to the circumstances. For instance, the *Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta* by Śrī Narahari Sarakāra Ṭhākura, an eminent associate of Lord Caitanya, might not have been counted among the most important texts for ISKCON devotees, but in the 1990' it became a leading reference about the issue of re-initiation. If more *apa-sampradayas* start infiltrating ISKCON, the same book may again come under the spotlight: "Śrī Narahari Sarakāra Ṭhākura, in his book *Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta*, has corrected the improper statements of the *gaurāṅga-nāgarī-vādīs*, *sakhībheka-vādīs*, and others of the eleven pseudodisciplic chains that claim to follow Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu." (SB 11.1.24, purport) So, importance also depends on the subject and the need of the times.

There is also a hierarchy of relevance specifically to Gaudiya-vaisnavas. Detailed instructions on how to reach the heavenly planets, for instance, will have little interest for the followers of Mahāprabhu. The great trickery of the neo-*smārtas* is mixing up and redefining *śāstric* hierarchies to support their views.

Are you sure that this is the right way?

Of course, we are following śāstra!

Which one?

What?! Aren't they all the same?

ISKCON neo-smārtas

anti-smārtas ≠ campaign

Śrīla Prabhupāda,
Cc Madhya, 22.118, purport:

“In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement we have therefore limited our study of Vedic literatures to *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. These four works are sufficient for preaching purposes. They are adequate for the understanding of the philosophy and the spreading of missionary activities all over the world.”

In ISKCON we should focus on *śāstra* that are relevant and recommended by the Gaudiya-vaisnava *ācāryas*. Going outside those parameters, as neo-*smārtas* do, or relativizing the Gaudiya-vaisnava references, is very dangerous.

Manu-samhitist, Sophist & Escapist

In an email exchange, a prominent neo-*smārta* was extolling the glories (real or imaginary) of the *Manu-samhita*; but a devotee replied, apparently demolishing his enthusiasm, and causing him to bolt. The devotee, who was defending our *sampradāya*, wrote:

"In fact, if we thoroughly study the Manu-samhita [MS], we will find that Prabhupada and other great Acaryas blatantly ignored many, probably most, of its injunctions. Further, the Manu text available today is considered to be a corrupted text. Lest you think that these literatures cannot be corrupted, Sripada Madhvacarya states that the Maha-bharata text is 'thoroughly corrupted by interpolations, extrapolations, and transpositions of text.' The MS is especially notorious for its statements on women. Here are a few samples of MS texts that Prabhupada and all other Acaryas blatantly ignored:

'One should not marry women who have reddish hair, redundant parts of the body [such as six fingers], one who is often sick, one without hair or having excessive hair and one who has red eyes.'

'One should not marry women whose names are similar to constellations, trees, rivers, those from a low caste, mountains, birds, snakes, slaves or those whose names inspires terror.'

'Wise men should not marry women who do not have a brother and whose parents are not socially well known.'

'Wise men should marry only women who are free from bodily defects, with beautiful names, grace/gait like an elephant, moderate hair on the head and body, soft limbs and small teeth.'

'A Brahman who marries a Shudra woman . . . is bound to go to hell after death.'

'A Brahman, true defender of his class, should not have his meals in the company of his wife and even avoid looking at her. Furthermore, he should not look towards her when she is having her meals or when she sneezes/yawns.'

'Men may be lacking virtue, be sexual perverts, immoral and devoid of any good qualities, and yet women must constantly worship and serve their husbands.'

'Women have no divine right to perform any religious ritual, nor make vows or observe a fast. Her only duty is to obey and please her husband and she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven.'

'In case a woman tears the membrane [hymen] of her vagina, she shall instantly have her head shaved or two fingers cut off and made to ride on donkey.'

'In case a woman, proud of the greatness of her excellence or her relatives, violates her duty towards her husband, the King shall arrange to have her thrown before dogs at a public place.'

'Any women who disobey orders of her lethargic, alcoholic and diseased husband shall be deserted for three months and be deprived of her ornaments.'

In fact, Smṛti literature contains thousands of injunctions that no Acarya ever followed nor taught. Here are some more 'injunctions' supposedly from Manu Smṛti that no Vaishnava Acarya has ever endorsed or taught: Prabhupada could never have created a Krishna consciousness movement if he followed this injunction: 'If a person of lower caste adopts the occupation of a higher caste, the king ought to deprive him of all his property and expel him from his kingdom.' (Manusmṛiti, X: 96)

Imagine the effect of this injunction on ISKCON preaching: 'If a Shudra (lowest caste member) dares to give moral lessons to a Brahmin, the king is to get him punished by pouring hot oil in his ear and mouth.' (Manusmṛiti, VII: 272) Shall we teach devotees and the public the following acceptable murder? 'If a Brahmin kills a Shudra, he is to perform penance by killing a cat, frog, owl or crow, etc.' (Manusmṛiti, XI: 131)

Should we impose this rule in ISKCON? 'It is the highest duty of the woman to burn herself after her husband.' (Brahma Purana 80.75)

How about this? 'When a woman, proud of her relations [or abilities] deceives her husband (with another man), then the king should [ensure that] she be torn apart by dogs in a place much frequented by people. And the evil man should be burnt in a bed of red-hot iron.' (Manusmṛiti, MS VIII: 371/372)

According to Krishna Kīrti prabhu, we should follow all the above injunctions. To say that all *smṛti* literature is in strict accord is ludicrous and shows that one knows

very little of Sanskrit literature. For example, how will one reconcile the Manu-samhita with famous Vaishnava statements such as this, often quoted by Prabhupada, which violates hundreds of *smṛti* rules:

*ṣat-karma-nipuṇo vipro matratantra-viśāradaḥ
avaiṣṇavo guru na syād vaiṣṇavaḥ śva-paco guruḥ*

'A learned vipra, expert in the six duties and learned in mantra and tantra, if a non-devotee, may not be a guru. A devotee dog-eater can be a guru.'

Similarly, the CC 2.8.128 states:

*kibā vipra, kibā nyāsī, śūdra kene naya
yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā, sei 'guru' haya*

'Whether a learned *brāhmaṇa*, or a *sannyāsī*, or even if a *śūdra*, one who knows the truth of Kṛṣṇa is actually a guru.' Again, one can hardly count all the *smṛti* rules violated by this statement in CC.

I will stop here for now. In summary, the arguments given are in fact the same arguments given for centuries by the notorious *smārtas* who for centuries tried to stop the expansion of Krishna consciousness, by imposing irrelevant caste and *smṛti* rules that are not required for Krishna consciousness. In fact, our Acaryas taught a very tiny, miniscule percentage of the thousands upon thousands of *smṛti* rules . . . [other] our Acaryas simply ignored, as they are irrelevant, or detrimental, to Krishna consciousness."

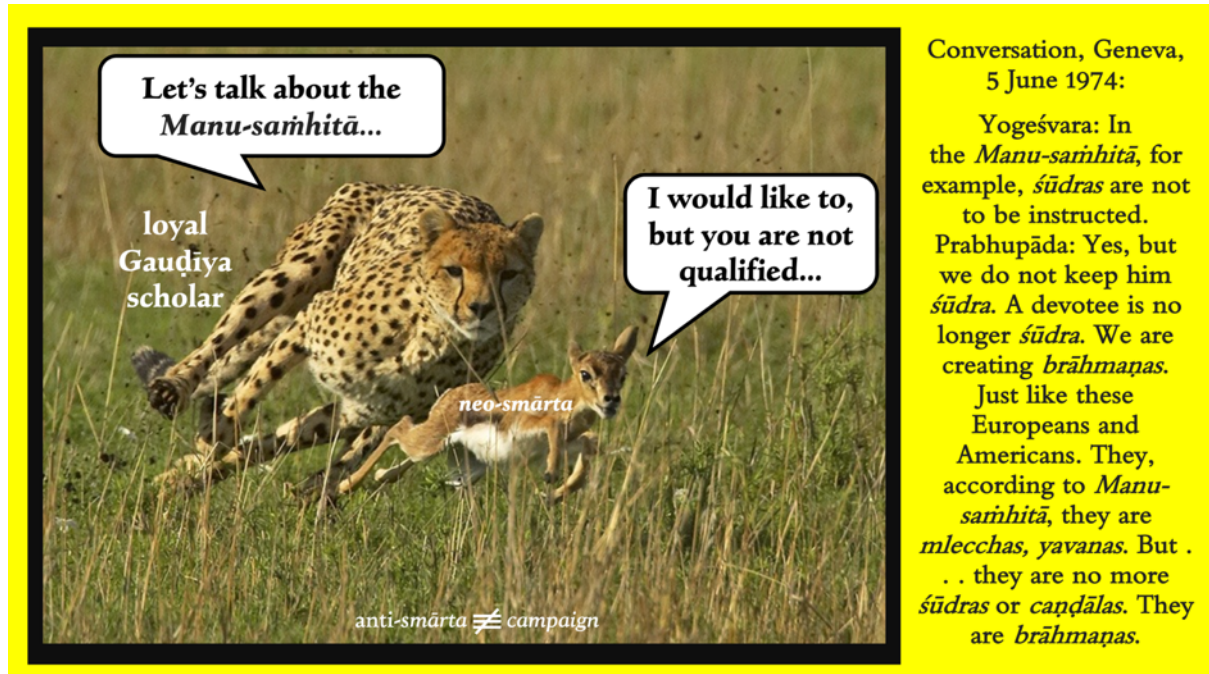
----- end of the quoted email -----

The neo-*smārta* could only address this point: "Wise men should marry only women who are free from bodily defects, with beautiful names, grace/gait like an elephant, moderate hair on the head and body, soft limbs and small teeth." [MS 3.10] He quoted a 1909 book by a jurist and explained (convincingly, I must admit) that the above is not an obligatory rule but a recommendation; a good advice. Women not possessing the above characteristics should also be able to get married.

OK. But what about the chopping of fingers and the throwing to the dogs? What about the idea that women "must constantly worship and serve their husbands" even if they are "sexual perverts, immoral and devoid of any good qualities"? Let's remember that Narada Muni says something diametrically different, "a chaste woman should engage with affection in the service of a husband who is not fallen."

(SB 7.11.28) Srila Prabhupada elaborates in detail in the purport.⁴ (Of course, leaving one's husband would require substantial corruption on his part and, in any case, it's not something to be done lightly, on the spur of the moment, without thorough counseling by wise elders.)

The neo-*smārta* addressed that devotee in the third person and gave the following excuse: "In any case, there is no point in me replying to the rest . . . because he doesn't know enough about the topic to comment meaningfully about it." At this point he bravely turned tail and fled. Strategic retreat or cowardly escape? He was offered a golden opportunity to offer explanations, if he had any. (The fugitive, you may have guessed it by now, is a member of the pompously titled "ISKCON India Scholars Board.")



Irresponsibly promoting texts that aren't relevant, especially not in their entirety, is a behavior typical of neo-*smārtas*. From those texts we can (and should) extract some relevant ideas or universal principles, as Srila Prabhupada did, but taking them literally and completely would be lethal for the *sankirtana* movement. (But isn't that exactly what the neo-*smārtas* want, to demolish the *sampradāya*?) We honor the lawgiver, Svayambhuva Manu, as one of the twelve *mahājana*,⁵ great authorities, but how much of his original teachings are left in the present versions of *Manu-saṁhitā*? And even within what's still authentic in the text, how much is relevant for us today?

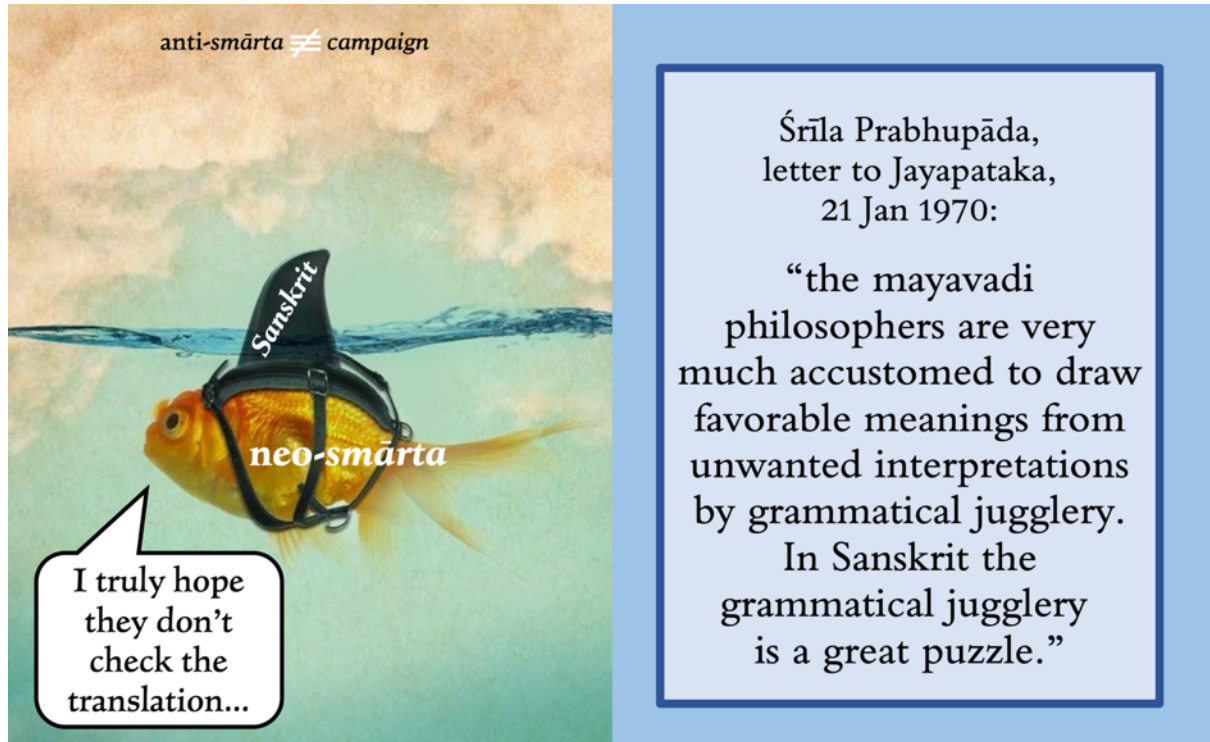
⁴ <https://vedabase.io/en/library/sb/7/11/28/>

⁵ In some cases, Srila Prabhupada also describes Vaivasvata Manu as a *mahajana*.

Fake News in Sanskrit Are Still Fake News

A technique the neo-*smārtas* profusely use in their misinformation campaigns is filling their blabbering with Sanskrit mumbo-jumbo. Devotees respect the Sanskrit language and the culture built on it (as we certainly should) and instinctively think, "Oh, it's Sanskrit... it must be bona fide." There is news for them: you can speak nonsense in every language, and Sanskrit is not an exception. Just as an example: the Vedanta commentary by Sankaracarya is in Sanskrit -but it's pure poison for the soul.

Most devotees don't know Sanskrit (besides a few words here and there) and so they feel intimidated by it. They feel unequipped to discuss or refute arguments sprinkled with Sanskrit. They feel intellectually paralyzed and impotent. Neo-*smārtas* apparently count on it. Their whole architecture of fabrications, mistranslations, and misinterpretations hinges on devotees not able to verify what they are saying.

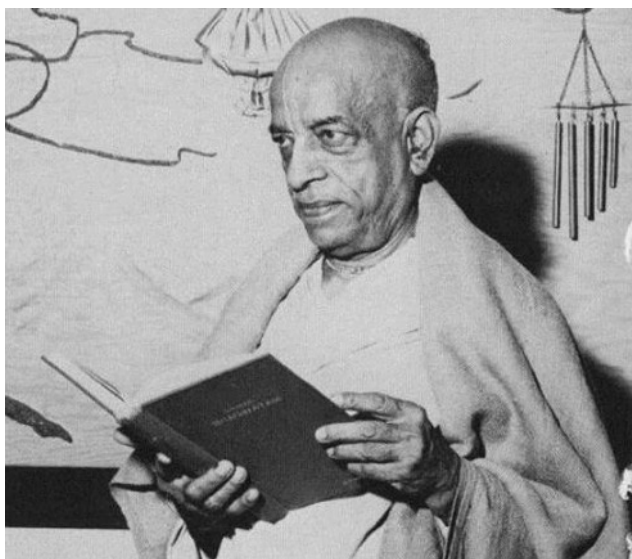


I am not Sanskrit scholar; but I studied enough formal and colloquial Sanskrit, I have access to enough Sanskrit scholars, enough dictionaries, and enough translating devices, that I don't feel particularly deferential in front of Sanskrit exhibitionism. Sanskrit showoff may be a tool in the neo-*smārtas'* bag of tricks, but when true scholars challenge their word-jugglery, neo-*smārtas* get hammered. Some tiny *devanagari* display may make them look as sharks in the ocean of *śāstra*, but when someone calls their bluff, they show themselves as helpless, wretched red fish.

If you don't know Sanskrit and feel a bit overpowered when facing arguments peppered with Sanskrit expressions, don't worry, take a deep breath, and remember that imposters have been using Sanskrit for thousands of years to spread distortions and deceptions. ISKCON neo-*smārtas* are just the last brand of charlatans.

Books Are the Basis - Abusing *Śāstra* Destroys Everything

I am spending some time on *śāstra* because once we misrepresent *śāstra* - either by mistranslating them or by focusing on irrelevant texts - we seriously compromise the mood, mission, and message of the *sampradāya*. "Everything should be done according to *śāstra*." Srila Prabhupada says, "And the *śāstra* should be guided by *ācārya*, *guru*." (Lecture on SB 1.16.3, Los Angeles, 31 Dec 1973) Building a society contrary to the *śāstric* directions of the *ācāryas* creates an anachronistic monstrosity, a Frankenstein-*varṇāśrama*.



One may not immediately see the effects of the deviancy, but the *apa-sampradāya* influence eat away at the essence of ISKCON. One may still see temples being built and funds being raised, but gorgeous constructions and robust collections are not in themselves reliable measures of spiritual success. Look at the Jain temples: there are more than 8,500 of them in India, and they often outclass our buildings in grandeur and opulence, but the Jain community is unapologetically atheist.

We can't judge the spiritual health of a religious group simply by how much marble they pack in their temples, churches, or mosques. "It was in Rādhā-kuṇḍa." Srila Prabhupada reminisced, "So Guru Mahārāja was speaking to me that 'Since we have got this Baghbazar marble temple [in Kolkata], there has been so many dissensions, and everyone is thinking who will occupy this room or that room, that room. I wish, therefore, to sell this temple and the marble and print some book.'" (Arrival lecture, Los Angeles, 20 June 1975)

Beware of the Pseudo-Vedic Path

Within the vast spread of *śāstra*, once everything is said and done; and when the incompatible doctrines are set aside (Sakta, Saiva, Nyaya, Vaisesika, atheistic Sankhya, Karma-mimamsa, Advaita Vedanta, etc.), Vaisnavas accept three processes of spiritual advancement as bona fide:

- *Vaidika-vidhana*
- *Pañcarātri-vidhi*
- *Bhagavata-marga*

Vaidika is just for very selected people - practically non-existent anymore: “In this Kali-yuga, there is no *vaidika dīkṣā*, because *vaidika dīkṣā* depends on the persons being a . . . sanctified *brāhmin*. A sanctified *brāhmin* means that before his birth, the *garbhādhāna-saṁskāra* is observed. If it is not observed, then he immediately falls down to the category of *sūdra*.” (Wedding Lecture, Delhi, 17 Nov 1971)

Although for previous ages the *vaidika* process was authentic and authorized, it's not applicable today - and therefore ISKCON devotees need to respectfully archive it. What the Gaudiya-*ācāryas* recommend are the *pañcarātriki* and *bhāgavata* methods: “Two processes should be followed: *pañcarātriki vidhi* and *bhāgavata-vidhi*. We follow both.” (Lecture on Bg 9.2, Calcutta, 8 March 1972)

Śrīla Prabhupāda: “*Vidhāna* means bona fide process . . . in the Kali-yuga, because it is to be understood that everyone is a *sūdra*, therefore *Vaidika-vidhāna* cannot be applied.” (NOD lecture, Vrindavana, 27 Oct 1972)
“Two processes should be followed: *pañcarātriki-vidhi* and *bhāgavata-vidhi*. We follow both.” (Lecture, Bg 9.2, Calcutta 8 March 1972)



Be very careful with those who say "Vedic" every three words. There is a good chance that:

1. They don't know what they are talking about.
2. They are not promoting Vedic ideas but their pseudo-Vedic blabber.
3. They may disorient and confuse you by advocating traditional practices that are best kept in the past.
4. They may be trying to transmogrify ISKCON, from being a bona fide branch of the Caitanya-*sampradāya* to an asphyxiating caricature of *sanātana-dharma*.

Srila Prabhupada explains how the *apa-sampradāyas* (and he specifically includes the *smārtas*) can "spoil the spirit of His [Mahāprabhu's] cult."

"Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu warned all His followers not to become independent or impudent. Unfortunately, after the disappearance of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu, many *apa-sampradāyas* (so-called followers) invented many ways not approved by the *ācāryas*. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has described them as the *āula*, *bāula*, *kartābhajā*, *neḍā*, *daraveśa*, *sāni sahajiyā*, *sakhībhekī*, *smārta*, *jāta-gosāñi*, *ativāḍī*, *cūḍādhārī* and *gaurāṅga-nāgarī*. The *āula-sampradāya*, *bāula-sampradāya* and others invented their own ways of understanding Lord Caitanya's philosophy, without following in the footsteps of the *ācāryas*. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu Himself indicates herein that all such attempts would simply spoil the spirit of His cult." (Cc Madhya, 1.271, purport)

Forewarned is forearmed. A devotee made a wry observation: "It's ironic that Srila Bhaktisiddhanta established the *brāhmaṇa* thread as a way to breathe more life into the preaching, now it seems we're being choked by it."

When I posted this section online, someone asked for more details: "Maybe I am behind the rest of your audience in terms of knowing the definition of the three paths. If not too much trouble, could you define them briefly?" Sure, here it's a short elaboration.

The Vaidika, Pañcarātrika & Bhāgavata Paths

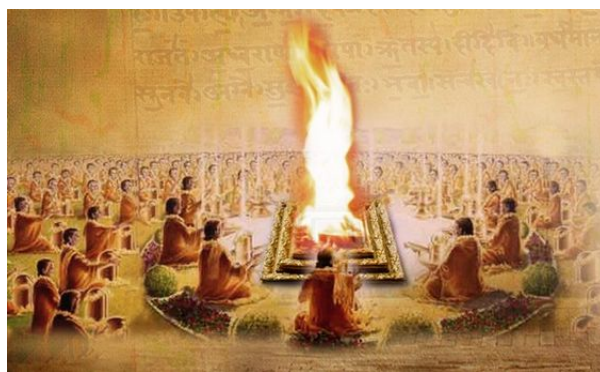
Vaidika (Sanskrit for *Vedic*) means activities centered on the methods delineated by the four *samhitas* (the four Vedas) such as elaborate fire *yajñas* (with rigorously accurate chanting of *mantras*, etc.). The qualifications necessary for making spiritual advancement through this path are very high and practically inaccessible today. And birth does play a central role in the system.

In the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (11.27.7), Krishna declares: "One should carefully worship Me by selecting one of the three methods by which I receive sacrifice: Vedic, tantric or mixed." *Vaidika* indicates sacrifices performed with *mantras* from the four Vedas and the supplementary texts. *Tāntrika* refers to books such as the



Pañcarātra and the *Gautamīya-tantra*. "Mixed" means utilizing both *vaidika* and *tāntrika* literatures. But of course: "superficial imitation of elaborate Vedic sacrifices will not bring one the actual perfection of life. One must perform sacrifice according to the prescription of the Supreme Lord, who recommends for this age the chanting of His holy names: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare." (SB 11.27.7, purport)

Srila Prabhupada explains: "*Trayyām* means Vedas. Veda is called *trayi* because there are three kinds of different processes: *karma-kāṇḍa*, *jñāna-kāṇḍa* and *upāsana-kāṇḍa*. So *jaḍi-kr̥ta*. Just like in India there is a section called Ārya-samājīs. They are very much attached to performance of these sacrifices. They say that, 'We do not want anything. We shall simply chant the Vedic mantra.' Of course, they cannot do it properly. That is also gone. Simply as a formality, they ignite some fire and, hither and thither, some mantra—finished. (laughter) Especially in this age, these sacrifices are not possible . . . they attract people by this performance of *yajña*, although in this age *yajña* is not possible because there is no *yajñic* brāhmin . . . Actually, the *brāhmins* had so much power in those days that simply by mantra, they would ignite fire. That fire was not ignited by matches—by mantra." (Lecture, Gorakhpur, 17 Feb. 1971) So, the days for *vaidika* methods are over.



Pañcarātrika essentially refers to Deity worship and the lifestyle conducive to purification (cleanliness, etc.). *Bhagavata-marga* refers to processes such as hearing and chanting about Krishna, reading books, etc. (*marga*, *vidhana* or *vidhi* are different words that indicate similar concepts: path, method, process, regulations...

like that) *Bhagavata-marga* is the most powerful, but we need the purificatory *pancaratrika* practices as well. Srila Prabhupada recommends we practice both:

"So we have got books also, philosophy also, plus the *sankirtana*, combined together . . . *sankirtana* as well as books, that, that is called *bhagavata-marga*, and the Deity worship is called *pañcarātrika-vidhi*. Both of them should go parallel . . . The Deity worship will help you in the path of *bhagavata-marga*, and the *bhagavata-marga* will help you in the *pañcarātrika-vidhi*. So combine together; make progress." (Arrival Lecture, Sydney, 12 Feb 1973)

"*Bhāgavata-mārga* will help the *pañcarātrika-mārga*, or process, and the *pañcarātrika* process will help *bhāgavata* process. Both together is helpful. Therefore my Guru Mahārāja introduced... you have seen the, what is called? That signia? One side, *pañcarātriki-vidhi*, one side *bhāgavata-viddhi* . . . that Gauḍīya Math emblem. Yes. And so actually *bhāgavata-mārga* is very strong. That is sufficient. But without *pañcarātrika-vidhi* this polluted body, polluted mind of the devotee, cannot be purified. Therefore both the processes should be adopted in preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement." (Lecture, Gorakhpur, 17 Feb. 1971)

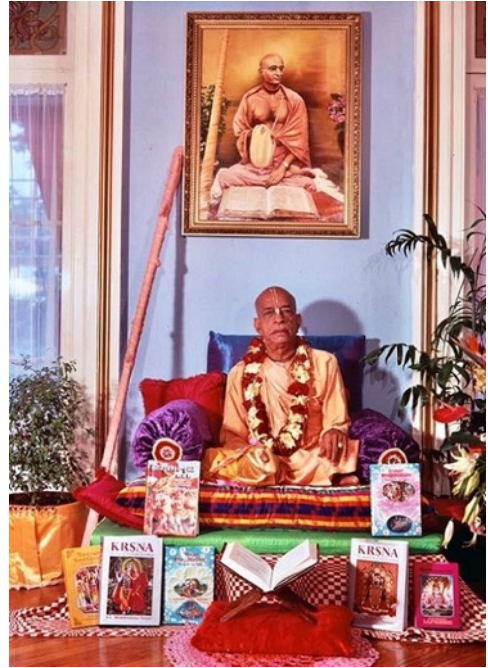


The insignia or emblem Srila Prabhupada refers to; the words *pañcarātra* and *bhāgavata*, in Bengali, are on the books near the top, on both sides of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu.

Subverting the Epistemic Hierarchies

A leading neo-*smārta* sophist (and a prominent member of the "ISKCON India Scholars Board"), wrote, referring to the Vaisnavi *diksa-gurus* debate: "the big mistake in these debates is taking Srila Prabhupada as primary, or direct, evidence." (Email of Jun 22, 2021) Right; why should ISKCON members take the instructions of the Founder-*Ācārya* so seriously?!

Apparently, what the Vedic literature told us for centuries and millennia, that the way to understand *śāstra* is through the *ācārya*, was wrong: "There is no other alternative than to follow this principle . . . to follow the opinion of *ācārya*. *Ācāryopāsanam*. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* it is stated, 'If you want to make progress in knowledge, then you have to follow.' *Ācāryopāsanam*: 'You have to worship *ācārya*.' *Ācāryopāsanam* [Bg 13.8]. In the Veda it is, *ācāryavān puruṣo veda* [*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.14.2]. Veda means knowledge, one who knows. Who knows? 'Who has got *ācārya* to guide him.' *Ācāryavān puruṣo veda* . . . This Vedic system always gives us injunction. *Tad-vijñānārthan sa gurum evābhigacchet* [*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.12]: 'One must go to the authority.'" (Lecture on Cc Adi 3.87-88, New York, 27 Dec 1966)



And these injunctions are from the *Gitopaniṣad*, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* and the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* - not Mickey Mouse.

But the neo-*smārta* stalwart has a different idea. You wish to sabotage the *sampradāya*? The first step is delegitimizing the Gaudiya-vaisnava *ācāryas* and relativizing the Gaudiya *śāstric* references. For him the Vaisnava *ācāryas* are just another source, not higher than, say, Canakya Pandita (a "worldly man"). You don't believe me? Please keep reading. But first of all, how the Gaudiyas should see their *ācāryas*? On the same level of any *dharma-śāstra* author or morality writer? Let's hear from Srila Prabhupada (that is, if you still take him seriously):

"Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's versions are accepted as Vedic versions, *śruti-pramāṇa*. [please note: *śruti* - not *smṛti* - this distinction will be important later on] *Viśvanātha*

Cakravartī Ṭhākura says that the statements of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura are as good as Vedic evidences. Therefore we quote from Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura often. Not, not only Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura—Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī and the six Gosvāmīs, they are authorities." (Lecture on NOD, Vrindavana, 13 Nov 1972)

This idea apparently is anathema to the neo-*smārtas*. The email writer declares: "according to the shastras, the words of an acharya are considered to have authority on the level of the *smṛtis*, not the *śrutis* . . . Manu-sahmita 2.6."⁶

But Srila Prabhupada said the same thing several times, including in the *Bhagavatam* itself: "Anything sung in the praise of the Lord is *śruti-mantra*. There are songs of Ṭhākura Narottama dāsa, one of the *ācāryas* in the Gauḍīya-sampradāya, composed in simple Bengali language. But Ṭhākura Viśvanātha Cakravartī, another very learned *ācārya* of the same *sampradāya*, has approved the songs by Ṭhākura Narottama dāsa to be as good as Vedic mantras." (SB 1.10.20, purport)

But the speculation doesn't end there. The staunch neo-*smārta* goes on with a terrifying syllogism: "Lord Manu gives the characteristics of those qualified to write *smṛti* . . . This definition would include great acharyas like Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya, the Six Gosvamis, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, Srila Prabhupada, etc. Their writings are considered shastra - specifically *smṛti*. Note that this definition would include those who are not necessarily pure Vaishnavas, like Chanakya."

He was already off from the beginning, but here his deviation reaches the apex. He puts Canakya Pandita in the same category of authority as great *ācāryas* as Jiva Goswami and Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, although Srila Prabhupada clearly said that Canakya "was not authority in the spiritual sense. He was a politician—moralist, politician. That's all. Worldly man." (Conversation, Indore, 13 Dec 1970) But, no, he puts the *ācāryas* and the pious politician Canakya on the same general level.

So, when the neo-*smārtas* quote Rupa Goswami's "*śruti-smṛti-puranadi...*" that the devotees should follow *śruti* and *smṛti*, they don't mean it in the same way as the Gaudiyas. Neo-*smārtas* may arbitrarily include obscure, irrelevant *dharma-sāstras*, and suggest that they possess the same value, gravitas, and authority of, say, the *Sat Sandarbhas* by Jiva Goswami or Srila Prabhupada's *Bhagavatam* commentaries.

⁶ You can take a look at the *Manu-samhita* verse and verify for yourself the mangling of meaning: <https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/manusmriti-with-the-commentary-of-medhatithi/d/doc145579.html>

With an interpretive sleight of hand, he destabilizes the hierarchy of authority. His syllogism is pure poison:

1. The *ācāryas'* words are on the level of *smṛti*.
2. Canakya Pandita's words (and of similar compilers of moral codes) are also on the level of *smṛti*.
3. Therefore the teachings of Canakya (or of any *dharma-sāstra* writer) are on the same level of authority of the great Gaudiya-*ācāryas*, on the same level of, say, *Caitanya-caritamrita*.

This allows the neo-*smārtas* to corroborate their mundane, caste-centered theories with "*sāstra*." Please, take this seriously. This sneakiness forms one of the core techniques of the neo-*smārta* approach: the Gaudiya-*ācāryas* can be refuted and overridden by any reference to any text of their choice. This illegitimate trickery, if undetected, contributes to demolish the epistemic architecture of Gaudiya-vaisnavism, leaving the door open to any misinterpretation and interpolation.

In hundreds of ISKCON temples the *guru-puja* song by Narottama Das Thakura (whose words are on the level of *śruti*, not just *smṛti*) reverberates daily:

*guru-mukha-padma-vakya, cittete koriya aikya,
ar na koriho mane asa*

"My only wish is to have my consciousness purified by the words emanating from his lotus mouth." In the neo-*smārta* version the tune is the same, but the words are different:

*guru-mukha-debatable-vakya, I'll check with some remote sāstra
I'll then discard the words of Srila Prabhupada*

Neo-*smārta* headquarters

Are you sure we are on solid ground?

Rock solid, don't worry; nobody checks

"ISKCON India Scholars Board" mistranslations misinterpretations fabrications minimizing the Gaudiya acaryas threats of schism, etc.

anti-*smārta* ≠ campaign

Śrīla Prabhupāda, Morning Walk,
Hyderabad, 24 April 1974:

"You simply give some grammatical form and talk all nonsense, people will appreciate it. Jugglery. This is called jugglery. The Māyāvādī *paṇḍitas* also do that. All the Māyāvādīs they are against me, because I am talking about *Bhagavad-gītā* as it is, and they screw their own meaning by jugglery of words. So they are all enemies. The Māyāvādī *sannyāsīs*, *smārta-paṇḍitas*, all of them."

Seeking Support Outside of the *Sampradāya*

Another form of epistemic infidelity practiced by the neo-*smārtas* is going outside of the cultural, historical, and theological boundaries of Gaudiya-vaisnavism in their desperate attempt to find backing for their pet theories.

Premise: Nothing Wrong With Talking with Other Traditions



The author (right), in Kurma-ksetra, with the local head-pujari, Kurma Murali.

In interfaith or academic dialogue, in formal and informal interactions, ISKCON members speak with representatives of Christianity, Islam, and other religious or non-religious groups. In no way, shape, or form I am suggesting that we shouldn't communicate with all sorts of people, what to speak of talking with members of other bona fide Vaisnava lineages. For instance, I have myself discussed, say, the meaning of a *Bhagavatam* verse with a *sannyasi* of the Ramanuja *sampradāya* in Sriperumbudur (Ramanuja's birthplace); or inquired about their institutional structure to a Madhva *sannyasi* in Udupi. We can talk with them and with anyone else, but we shouldn't approach anyone with the

intention of delegitimizing the instructions of our Founder-*Ācārya*. Motivation is the key for evaluating the chastity of such exchanges. Are we engaging in genuine interfaith dialogue? Are we doing some lawful scholarly research? Or are we simply trying to collect ammunitions for destabilizing Gaudiya-vaisnavism?

How Could They Be Qualified to Settle ISKCON's Internal Debates?

We respect, say, the Sri and Madhva lines as bona fide Vaisnava disciplic successions, but how much socio-theological instruction can they provide if they don't even accept Lord Caitanya's Godhood, what to speak of His revolutionary brand of egalitarian *bhakti*? The *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita* makes a couple of heavy statements: "One who does not accept the glories of the Panca-tattva but still makes a



show of devotional service to Kṛṣṇa can never achieve the mercy of Kṛṣṇa or advance to the ultimate goal . . . One who does not accept Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Personality of Godhead is certainly a demon. Similarly, anyone who does not accept Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu as Kṛṣṇa, the same Supreme Lord, is also to be considered a demon." (Cc *Adi*, 8.7 & 9) Now, let me make it absolutely clear that I don't consider the followers of Ramanujācārya or Madhvācārya as demons for not having (yet) recognized Lord Caitanya as Krishna Himself. Just two verses after the above stern declarations, Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavīraja Goswāmī reports the conciliatory words of Śrī Caitanya: "If a person offers obeisances to Me, even due to accepting Me only as an ordinary *sannyasi*, his material distresses will diminish, and he will ultimately get liberation." (Cc *Adi*, 8.11) So, blessings are available to whoever offers *any* degree of respect to Lord Caitanya. But let's consider: are the non-Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavas aware of Lord Caitanya's vision and mission? Have they studied and subscribed to the rich Gaudiya textual tradition? Are they on the same page on everything, sociologically and philosophically speaking? Can they be considered Rūpaṅga? Can they be considered Prabhupādaṅga? If we cannot answer 'yes' to these and other similar questions, we should ask ourselves: how can these outsiders offer authoritative guidance on socio-theological matters, such as Vaiṣṇavi *dikṣa-gurus*? (Some of them don't even agree that Western-born male Vaiṣṇavas can become *brāhmaṇas*!) These devotees, even if respectable as representatives *of their line*, don't have the background, the context, or the training to guide our application of *varṇāśrama*. In that they are, so to speak, like fish out of water. Therefore, to go to these people with the intent of seeking support for one's favorite neo-*smārta* superstition is just an expression of disloyalty - if not of open betrayal.

Śrīla Prabhupāda did occasionally engage, say, South Indian *brāhmaṇas* for enhancing the cultural flavor (and the public acceptance) of certain rituals, such as Deities installations, but he never depended on their advice for main decisions about his mission.

Trouble in Paradise

We should also not gullibly expect that members of these traditions necessarily perfectly represent the teachings and spirit of their founders. Their *sampradāya ācāryas* have passed away centuries ago (almost 900 years in the case of Ramanujācārya and more than 700 for Madhvācārya). Śrīla Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvatī Thākura scrutinizingly studied various Vaiṣṇava lineages with his penetrating intelligence and encyclopedic erudition and, in his preface to the *Sat-kriya-sara-*

dipika by Gopala Bhatta Goswami, concluded: "It is not that the erroneous *smārta-vada* misconceptions have only penetrated the Vaishnava community of Bengal, they have also spread to other Vaisnava societies all over India; in some places more, in others, less."⁷ Only because one lineage is bona fide, it doesn't mean is perfect.

Besides, we also observe strong disagreements within these Vaisnava *sampradāyas*, on various matters (e.g.: should a Madhva *sannyasi* who crossed the ocean be ostracized by his community?) Perhaps more importantly, even if they were purely representing the teachings of their founders, to what extent would those teachings be fully relevant for Gaudiya Vaisnavas? We can safely conclude that some of their precepts and practices were particularly meant for pre-Mahaprabhu times.

I am sad to report this, but I was recently in Karnataka, in the house of a Sri Vaisnava *brāhmaṇa* who descends from a celebrated family. He is entrusted with the worship of one of the most ancient and important Deities in their *sampradāya*. In his dress and tilak markings he displays all the signs of a staunch Ramanuja follower. He is also exceptionally proficient in all sorts of esoteric mantras and rituals; but in his living room he keeps a large picture of Vivekananda, and in private he glorifies the writings of Osho. Obviously, not all Sri Vaisnavas are like that - thank God! - but I could give other examples of... disappointment faced in dealing with similar *brāhmaṇas*. An ISKCON devotee born and raised in a practicing Madhva *brāhmaṇa* family (the grandfather was worshiping the *salagrama sila* for three hours a day) told me that in some respects the Madhvas are more "*smārta*" than the *smārta* themselves. So, great respect for all the Vaisnava *sampradāyas* and their members, but also respectful distance from these esteemed traditions when it comes to subjects beyond their jurisdiction, such as directing the decisions in Lord Caitanya's mission. We should certainly not expect from them illuminations on socio-theological matters that are, so to speak, above their pay grade.

Misleading Interviews

For example, two neo-*smārtas* went to ask the opinions of two Sri Vaisnava *brāhmaṇas* on women *diksa-gurus*. Clearly, the neo-*smārtas*' intent was not to expand their historical or philosophical perspectives, but simply to corroborate their fantasies and snooping for "quotable quotes." Consulting with these gentlemen (as

⁷ Translated from the original Bengali, dated 14 April 1935.



if they were authorities for us) was an exercise in futility and deception. Their motivation wasn't academic curiosity, but the craving for support for their neo-*smārta* positions. In fact (was it by chance?), they chose to speak with members of the *Vadakalai* sect of the Ramanuja *sampradāya*, known for not allowing women and *sūdras* to receive or recite Vedic mantras, especially those including the *om̐kara*.



Ramanujacarya openly shares the mantra with everyone; Amar Chitra Katha version.

Just as an example: readers probably heard the story in which Ramanujacarya got the mantra *om̐ namo nārāyaṇāya* and, despite having been told by his guru not to reveal it to anyone, climbed on the temple tower and shouted it publicly, for everyone to hear it, receive it, and recite it. Well, the *Vadakalai* don't accept this episode as bona fide (or at least they don't take it as a precedent to follow). They stick to their ideas that only born *dvijās*, members of the three higher *varnas* by birth, and only males, can pronounce mantras containing *om̐*. The *brāhmanas* chosen by the neo-*smārtas* make that clear in the interview.

Srila Prabhupada elaborates on the event of sharing the mantra (which contained the *om̐kara*) with everyone, men, women, children, and whoever else happened to be there, including *sūdras* and lower than *sūdras*: "Ramanujacarya violated the order of the Spiritual Master to advance the cause of the Spiritual Master. The Spiritual Master's mission was to deliver fallen souls, therefore Ramanujacarya considered that if the mantra was so powerful to deliver the persons, why not deliver it to everyone as soon as possible. That was a little tactic to advance the cause of the Spiritual Master. So everything has to be judged by the motive, and as the motive of such apparent violation was very good, Ramanuja's Spiritual Master embraced him." (Letter to Satsvarupa, 14 Nov 1968)



Therefore, I wondered about “motive” when I watched the YouTube video entitled "Interview with Sriman Muralidhar Bhattar and Sri Vasudevan." Why interviewing them and not the more liberal *Tenkalai* Ramanuja followers, who accept that women and *sūdras* can also recite mantras with *om̐kara*? Anyway... as if on cue, the two *brāhmaṇas* shared their caste-conscious, birth-based prejudices (wasn't exactly the reason they were selected?), dutifully supporting the anti-VDG sentiments of the neo-*smārtas*. Mission accomplished!

Basically, whatever those two *brāhmaṇas* said clashed with Srila Prabhupada's teachings (besides clashing with other Sri Vaisnavas as well). Watching them talk about *sūdras* precluded from becoming *brāhmaṇas* or of women disallowed to chant *om̐kara*, was like experiencing a *déjà vu*, a rerun of all the prejudices the Gaudiya-*ācāryas* have been fighting against for centuries: "Regarding the validity of the

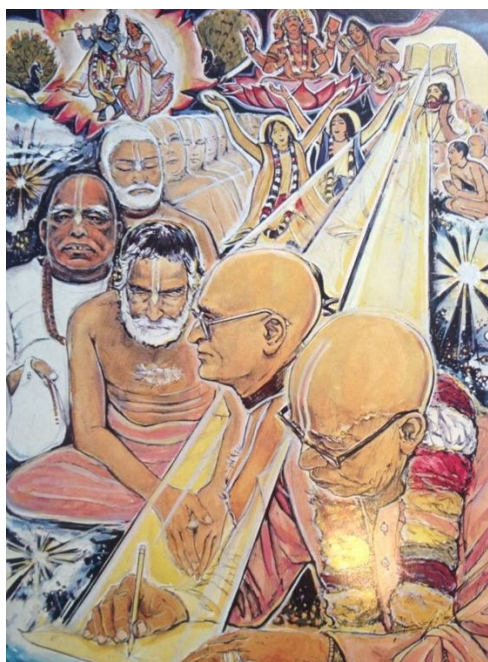
brahminical status . . . because in the present age there is no observance of the Garvodhan ceremony,” Srila Prabhupada writes, “even a person born in *brāhmaṇa* family is not considered a *brāhmaṇa* . . . the conclusion is that the whole population is now *sūdra* . . . for *sūdras* there is no initiation according to the Vedic system, but according to the *Pancaratrika* system initiation is offered to a person who is inclined to take Kṛṣṇa consciousness. During my Guru Maharaj's time, even a person was coming from a *brāhmaṇa* family, he was initiated according to the *pancaratrika* system taking him to be a *sūdra*. So the birthright *brhmanism* is not applicable at the present moment. The sacred thread inaugurated by my Guru Maharaja according to *pancaratrika* system and *Hari-bhakti-vilasa* by Srila Sanatana Goswami must continue. It does not matter whether the priestly class accepts it or not.” (Letter to Acyutananda, 14 Nov 1970) Yeah: "It does not matter whether the priestly class accepts it or not."



One of the comments to the video caught my eye, and so I quote from it: "We asked Gaura Keshava Das Prabhu (a Prabhupada disciple from Australia holding a degree in Vaisnavism from Madras University and who has studied and lived in South India for the last 40+ years) to clarify. He did: 'The interview is misleading. The *śāstras* that these Vaisnavas (both of whom I know well) are questioned about, equally deny *diksha guru* status to women and to those males not born in *dvija*/brahmin families. The reason I say that the conversation is misleading is that the devotees asking the question focus solely on the idea that women cannot be *diksha gurus* but refuse to ask if males not born in brahmin families also cannot be *diksha gurus* . . . The ISKCON devotees arguing against female *diksha gurus* in ISKCON are opening a can of worms. Because the same *śāstras* that deny women

the right to give *diksha* also deny most ISKCON male gurus to do the same. The history and tradition of female *diksha gurus* in North Indian *sampradayas* is clear especially [in the] Gaudiya *sampradāya* . . . It has to be noted that the Sri Vaisnavas in the interview belong to a section of the Sri *sampradāya* that will not allow for the chanting of *omkara* or *gayatri mantra* to anyone but males born in brahmin families . . . So when such Sri Vaisnavas don't even accept that we as persons born outside of brahmin families can't even chant *omkara*, how is it useful to ask them questions on whether females can be *diksha gurus*??? . . . According to Gaudiya Math and ISKCON any person who is elevated to the status of Vaisnava can chant *omkara*, *savitri gayatri* and is considered brahminical. Now these few ISKCON devotees want to suggest that all Vaisnavas in ISKCON are qualified but women aren't. This is hypocritical."

Hmm... "hypocritical"; not very... *brhamiṇical*. I must agree that looking for validation by talking with other *sampradāyas* (but not with those lineages having women *diksa-gurus*) reeks of hypocrisy. In Caitanya-vaisnavism you won't find such birth-based intolerance, therefore the casteist views of the neo-*smārtas* (and of the people they selectively seek support from), have no place in Gaudiya-vaisnavism.



Unsurprisingly, the two interviewers are - *drum roll* - members of the notorious "ISKCON India Scholars Board." A Board not known for philosophical competence or ethical integrity, but well-known for championing neo-*smārta* causes.

The War on Srila Prabhupada

Part of the neo-*smārta* tactics has been minimizing or discarding the thousands of letters of the Founder-*Ācārya*. In this section I will explain why this is completely unacceptable.

His Letters Are at Times More Important than His Books

No, this is not just a catchy title; I totally mean it. But let's proceed orderly. First, let's remember that a priority of the neo-*smārtas* is to systematically sideline and delegitimize the Founder-*Ācārya* (so that they can introduce whoever and whatever they like as authoritative). The attempt to divest his letters of authority is part of this overall plan. But's first let's look at the broad picture of Srila Prabhupada's recorded teachings. We often hear that there is a hierarchy of importance or authority in Srila Prabhupada's works that goes something like this:

1. Books
2. Lectures (on the books)
3. Conversations (including interviews and morning walks)
4. Letters.

There might be some variation, but basically that's it. Books are explicit commentaries on the main textual references: *Bhagavad-gita*, *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita*, *Sri Isopanisad* or *Upadesamrita*, or summary studies such as the *Nectar of Devotion*.

Lectures are, so to say, "expanded commentaries" on the books; not in the same style or approach of the Bhaktivedanta purports, but also elaborations on *slokas*. Formal to some extent - being spoken from the *vyasasana* - but not always as official or solemn as a written commentary. Some books can be included in the "lecture-*tattva*," being edited versions of lectures (*Teachings of Queen Kunti* or *Teaching of Lord Kapila*), or in the "conversation-*tattva*" collections of interviews and other discussions (*Science of Self-Realization*, etc.).

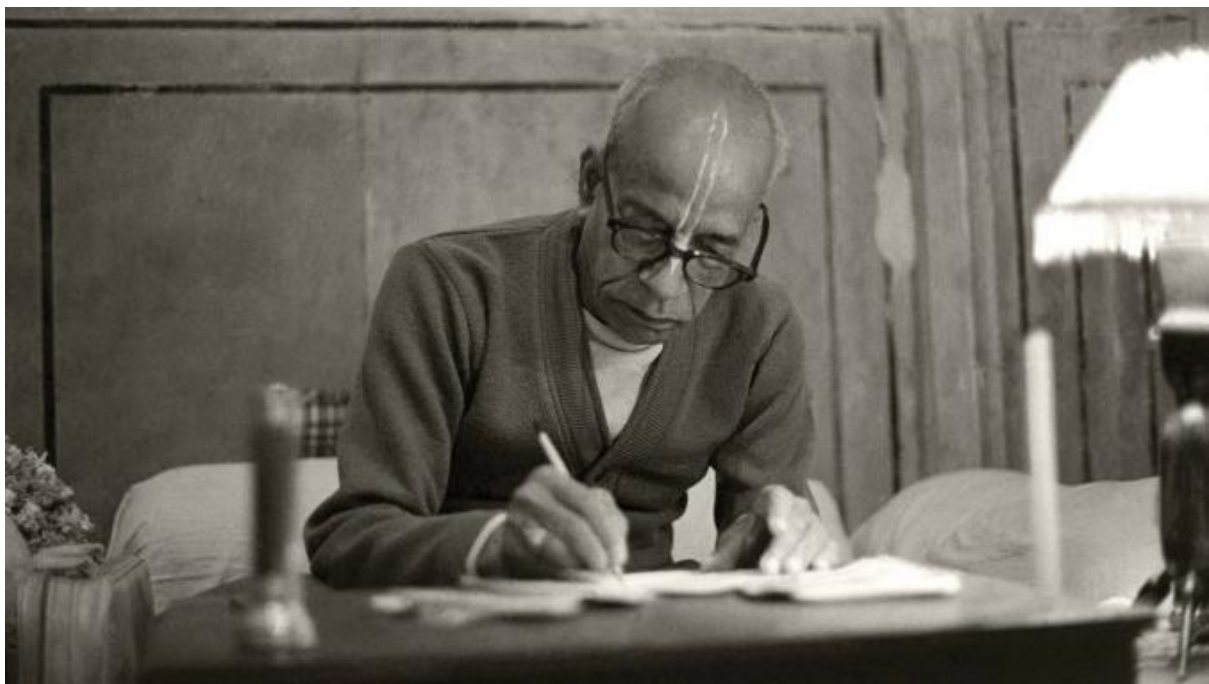
Conversations range from formal interviews with scholars, researchers, or journalists, to high-level exchanges with his leaders (such as GBC members), to more informal interactions. Depending on the subject, the context, and the interlocutors, conversations vary in mood - lighter, heavier, more intimate or more official. In some conversations people request clarifications or elaborations that get Srila Prabhupada to express instructions not available elsewhere, or with a higher degree of detail or bluntness (e.g.: comments about Gandhi in books or in private).

And then there are the 6,587 letters. Some say they may reach 7,000 in number; but, at any rate, it's a lot of correspondence. There have been attempts to minimize, relativize, or delegitimize the letters as less authoritative, less important sources of knowledge and instructions. Some neo-*smārtas* have elevated the discrediting of the letters to an art form, but others have also dabbled in repudiating them.

Someone even said that letters should not be circulated at all, despite what Srila Prabhupada wrote: **"Regarding your reprinting of my letters, if you will not detract from your other important engagements you may do it."** (Letter to Gargamuni, 17 Feb 1969) Of course, some letters were meant to remain confidential (at least for the time in which they were written), but those are a very small percentage.

In short, we could subdivide the contents of the letters in two categories:

1. Individual communications and guidance - of limited *direct* pertinence to others. For instance: "I am so happy to learn that both you and your good wife are now engaged in opening our new center in Baltimore . . . The house which you have described sounds very good for our purpose."



2. Broad principles for universal edification and application: **"Please also continue to cooperatively join with Philadelphia temple and the other temples . . . I want that all my students will cooperate fully for expanding our movement."**

In this case, both examples are from the same letter: to Vrindavana Candra, 5 June 1970.

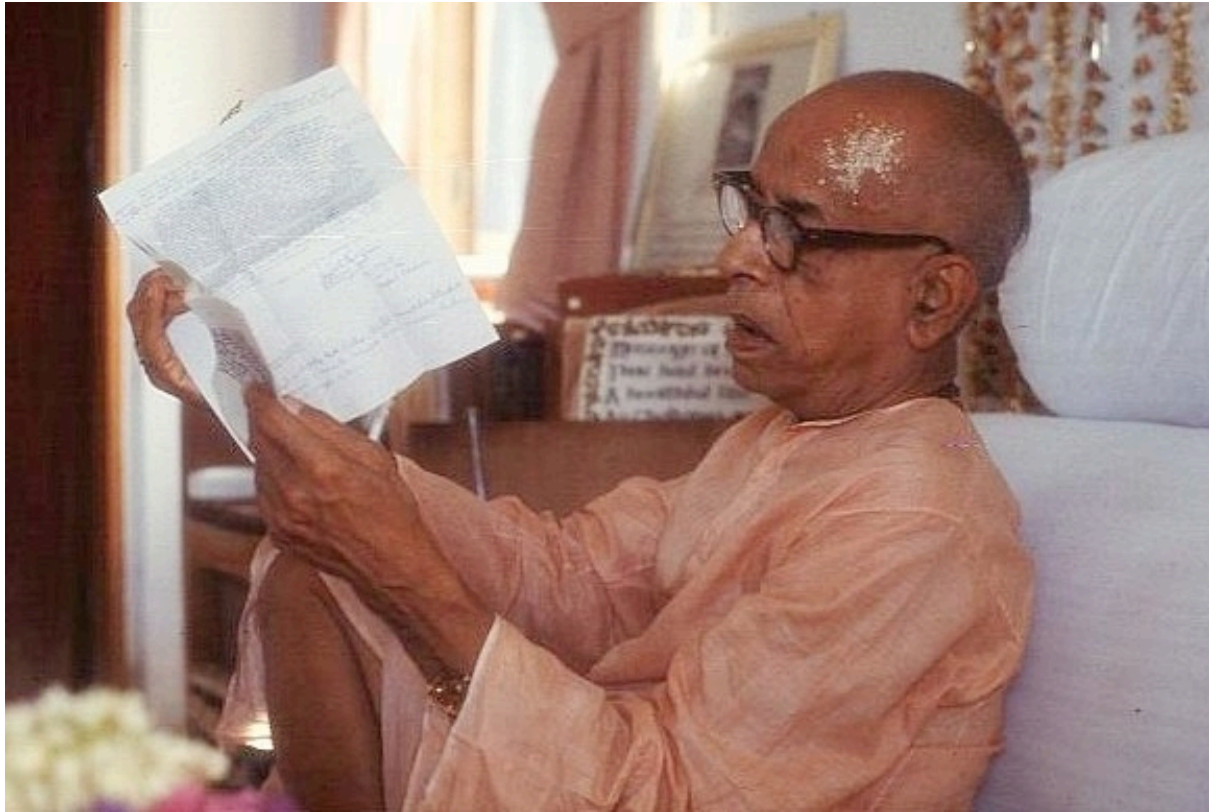
A few letters only contain personal directions, but most letters consist of both personal and universal instructions; and some were intended to be broadly distributed and don't include individual guidance. Letters are valuable on a variety of levels, and even the individual, private instructions offer precious insights on Srila Prabhupada's priorities and values, and on his way of acting as a guru to his disciples, on his dealing with other people (Godbrothers, political leaders, bank managers, etc.), or on how he led his Society. People can try to disprove the importance of the letters, but, besides whatever flimsy arguments and smokescreens they present, we need to understand why the neo-*smārtas* loath the letters. The answer is simple: **BECAUSE THEY DON'T LIKE WHAT'S WRITTEN IN THEM.** The letters burn to the ground their conjectures, often in a more direct and graphic way than the purports in the books. Same with the conversations. The neo-*smārtas* hate these whole categories of teachings because of being much harder to twist and distort.

I am not going to list all the functions that Srila Prabhupada's letters performed in the past and can perform at present and in the future - a book could be written on that - but now I want to focus on the title of this section: "His Letters Are at Times More Important than His Books." Why? Because certain topics - even subjects exceptionally important for the movement - are not touched at all in his books.

First example: the GBC; the Governing Body Commission (GBC) of the *International Society for Krishna Consciousness*. Now, you may like the present GBC to varying degrees, but I hope we can all agree that the GBC, at least conceptually, as a leadership model, it's crucial within Srila Prabhupada's plans for his Society.

But, lo and behold, there is nothing in the books about the GBC. Completely, absolutely, N - O - T - H - I - N - G.

There is one mention in *Caitanya-caritamrita* about the **"governing body"** that Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura **"requested all his disciples to form"** to **"conduct missionary activities cooperatively"** (Cc Adi, 12.8, purport), but there is nothing there or in any other book about ISKCON's governing body.



But there is so much about the GBC in the letters and in the conversations. Vanipedia reports more than 900 references to 'GBC' in the letters and more than 200 in the conversations ('GBC' or 'GBCs'). If you want to understand Srila Prabhupada's vision for the *Governing Body Commission*; if you want to know how he instructed his GBCs through correspondence and during meetings, or what he expected from them: you *must* study the letters and the conversations (alternatively you can just speculate or depend on fragmental recollections from eyewitnesses).

Next time a neo-*smārta* (or anyone else) tells you that letters are not important or are not authoritative references, ask them to show you where Srila Prabhupada says that *in the books*. They can't have it both ways; they can't say that the books are the only valid sources but not produce any evidence *from the books*.

Second example: the *śāstric* degrees. I am talking about *Bhakti-sastri*, *Bhakti-vaibhava*, *Bhakti-vedanta* and *Bhakti-sarvabhauma*. He was writing about them even in the days of the *League of Devotees*, in the 1950s (he's got the idea from his Guru Maharaja). Srila Prabhupada wrote about the degrees as prerequisites for becoming *brāhmaṇa*, *sannyasi*, and *diksa-guru*. They are therefore integral aspects of the movement and of the certification of its leaders. I hope we can all agree that they represent an important aspect of Srila Prabhupada's mission. Srila Prabhupada saw them as important milestones for devotees in building their knowledge of *śāstra*, their awareness of the Absolute Truth, their Krishna consciousness. But there is

nothing about the *śāstric* degrees in the books. If we want to understand this significant feature of Srila Prabhupada's strategy and legacy, we need to study the letters. Let me conclude with a pertinent quote (from a letter): **"I want that all of my spiritual sons and daughters will inherit this title of Bhaktivedanta, so that the family transcendental diploma will continue through the generations."** (Letter to Hamsaduta, 3 Jan 1969) I won't comment, but I ask you:

1. Does this look to you as a private, confidential instruction?
2. Does this sound to you as a personal advice, with no broader implementation?
3. Does this appear to you as something irrelevant for ISKCON's future?
4. Is this desire of the Founder-*Ācārya* mentioned anywhere in the books?

You get the idea. Srila Prabhupada's letters, ki jaya!

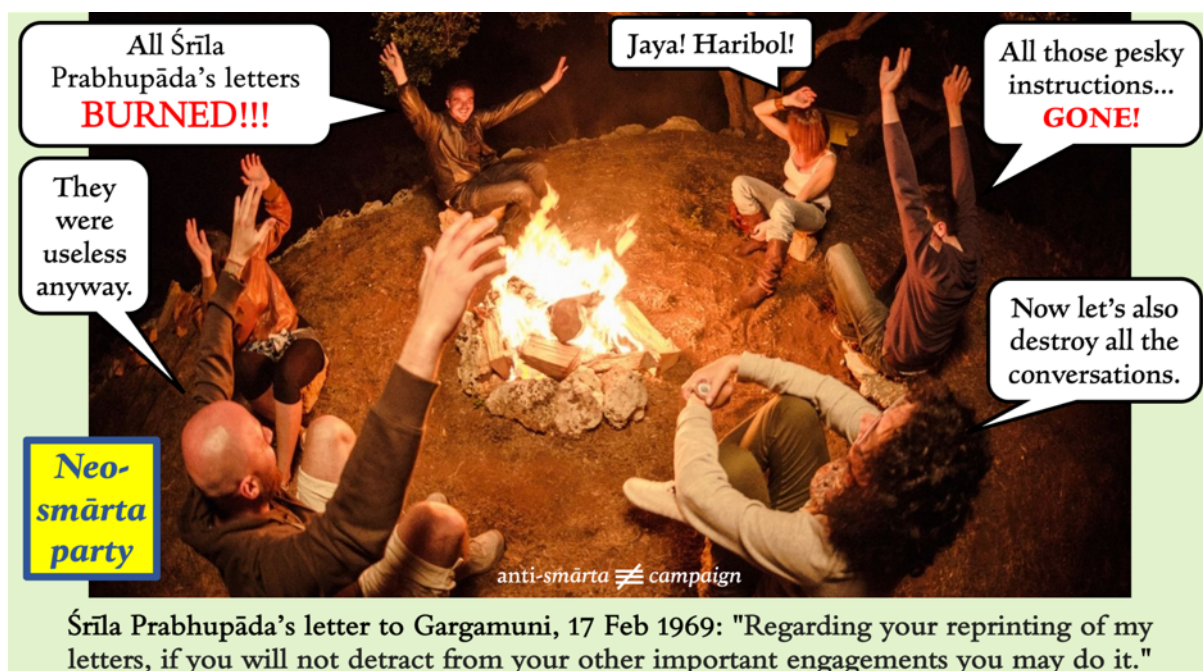
Discrediting Lectures, Letters & Conversations

Neo-*smārtas* are trying to systematically demolish the devotees' faith in Srila Prabhupada's words, his sacred *vāṇī*, by minimizing and denigrating his lectures, letters, and conversations. They don't like these sources because in them Srila Prabhupada relentlessly dismantles their stereotyped conceptions of *varṇāśrama*. They don't like the extracts from those sources because they pierce the bubble of their illusion. Srila Prabhupada's vision constantly collides with their opinions. They are disoriented by the sharp, plastic intelligence of the Founder-*Ācārya* and by his broad-mindedness. It's hard for them to reconcile his multifaceted, nuanced instructions and their own stunted dogmas. Neo-*smārtas* crave ossified formulas, predictable bromides that they can recite verbatim, mindlessly, like archaic, arcane litanies. They aspire for straight-jacketed labels, not for breathing truths.

The dynamic spiritual power and the capacity of synthesis of the Founder-*Ācārya* - expressed through thousands of interactions - disconcerts them. They seem rattled, perturbed by the depth of his acumen and the span of his comprehension. An ISKCON devoid of Srila Prabhupada's lectures, letters, and conversations would make them feel comfortable in their mental pigeonholes, more secure in their hackneyed, caste-centered clichés.

They seem to hate the fact that Srila Prabhupada considers - *seriously considers* - time, place, and circumstances, which clashes head-on with their petrified, calcified, sclerotized ideas of religion. Srila Prabhupada's vision of *varṇāśrama*, of ISKCON,

of the mission, is about a growing and adaptable movement - a living force. Their idea of *varṇāśrama* is a putrefied one, one already dead and stinking.



Recording Srila Prabhupada's Conversations - A Waste of Tape?

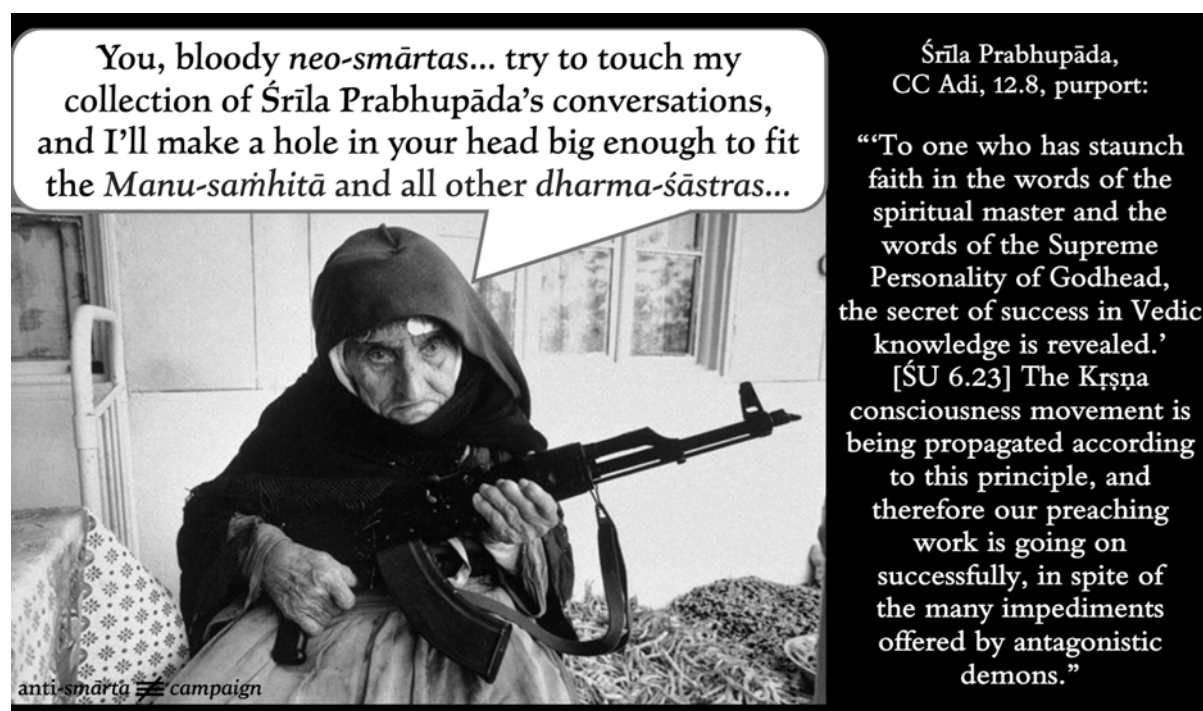
The background: at the 2020 ILS (ISKCON Leadership Sanga) I gave a seminar on *varṇāśrama*, quoting from different sources such as the *Atharva Veda*, the *Manu-samhita* (yes, I can also quote from *Manu-samhita* when pertinent); from the *Bhagavad-gita* and from multiple *Bhagavatam* purports. I also quoted Srila Prabhupada's lectures, letters, and conversations with prominent disciples, such as GBCs and *sannyasis*.

An anonymous *neo-smārta* hated my quoting the Founder-*Ācārya* extensively. He had the nerve to write, "the references cited are also culled from conversations, letters, and lectures that Srila Prabhupada gave to specific individuals and circumstances half a century ago . . . So then why does the presentation nonetheless depend so heavily upon it?"

Hmm... On what a *varṇāśrama* presentation should depend if not on Srila Prabhupada's instructions? On this person's pseudo-Vedic speculations? All conversations are valuable, but the ones I had quoted have special significance: it wasn't simply Srila Prabhupada speaking with "specific individuals" (as this person

alleges). It was the Founder-*Ācārya* teaching his top leaders, GBCs and *sannyasis*, so that they could teach the rest of ISKCON in the same way. Neo-*smārtas* hate such references, because in them Srila Prabhupada systematically demolishes their fantasies.

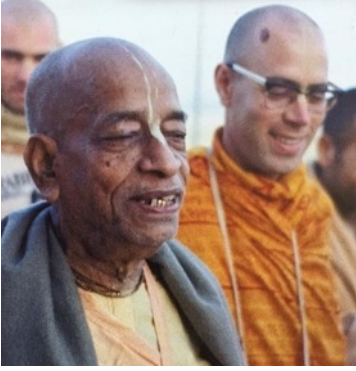
I wrote the leaders who published, on an official ISKCON site, the words of the anonymous person: "I am surprised you even considered publishing such drivel. Is this the *varṇāśrama* you wish to promote, culturally orphaned from Srila Prabhupada instructions in thousands of conversations, letters, and lectures?" I never heard from them.



Someone criticized this meme as inciting violence (!). First, the posture of the old lady is defensive (she is not assaulting anybody, just sitting there). Second, the metaphor is legit: we should all be infuriated with the neo-*smārtas* for trying to erase the words of our Founder-*Ācārya*.

Why They Detest the Lectures, Letters & Conversations So Much?

The straightforward answer: because in them Srila Prabhupada demolishes their prejudices. A statement in a book can be more easily misinterpreted than an exchange in which, say, Tamal Krishna Maharaja relentlessly drills down on a topic,



requesting Srila Prabhupada to clarify a point. Those familiar with the conversations have seen that dynamic (and that's why when you search Vanipedia for "Tamala Krsna" you get more than 13,000 entries).

Some pseudo-Vedic devotees wish to herd people into kibbutz-like settlements and use them as guineapigs for their social experiments. Neo-*smārtas* resent when Srila Prabhupada relativizes the importance of *varṇāśrama* in comparison to the power of the holy name. They therefore abhor exchanges such as this:

Prabhupāda: ISKCON is not going to be social reformer, but as far as possible, we can help. Our main business is how to make everyone Kṛṣṇa conscious. That is our business. We cannot take up, but if possible, we can take up all the system of *varṇāśrama*.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: If *varṇāśrama* is neglected, then how can there be proper functioning of society?

Prabhupāda: No. If the society chants Hare Kṛṣṇa seriously, then it is all right. Never mind whatever is done. It doesn't matter. *Pāpī tāpī jata chilo, hari-nāme uddhārilo*. This is the power of *hari-saṅkīrtana*. If one is absorbed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, so all benefit is there.

(Morning Walk, Mayapur, 9 Feb 1976)

This was at the time of the Mayapur festival, and Srila Prabhupada was talking with his top leaders, instructing them how to lead the movement, even after his disappearance. The above exchange took place just four days after another morning walk in which he instructed them: "you have to establish *varṇāśrama*." Conversations are essential to gain depth and context on a subject, to hear Srila Prabhupada expanding on a range of angles on the same topic. Lectures, conversations, and letters tremendously augment and enhance our understanding of Srila Prabhupada's books and of his role as Founder-*Ācārya*. But for neo-*smārtas* this broadness of perspectives is anathema - and they try their best to obliterate it.

In 2020, for instance, two anti-VDG spokespersons obtained one hour to peddle their theory to the whole GBC. They had the nerve to openly declare that they would base their presentation only on the books - rejecting all evidence in lectures, letters, and conversations (so that they could indulge in their favorite psychedelic trip, the Suniti Hallucination - more on that later). We will talk about Vaisnavi *diksa-gurus* afterward; I am mentioning this episode here because it graphically

illustrates the neo-*smārtas* attempt to discredit all references not fitting their beliefs. They artificially shrink the pool of facts, until they are left only with their pet quotes.

The neo-*smārtas* therefore write this kind of reviews (on a seminar on *varṇāśrama*): "the references cited are also culled from conversations, letters, and lectures that Srila Prabhupada gave to specific individuals and circumstances half a century ago . . . So then why does the presentation nonetheless depend so heavily upon it?" What can we gather from such a statement? Let's analyze the underlying beliefs.

1. Lectures are *circumstantial* - as if Srila Prabhupada would change the theology when presenting it in different places, to different listeners. Of course, the audience of the lectures does flavor some of its contents (e.g.: "**So you Indians who are present here**"), but who can think, even for a moment, that the Founder-*Ācārya* would compromise the purity of the philosophy depending on speaking, say, in Calcutta or in Caracas? Only a very disoriented devotee, one who doesn't understand Srila Prabhupada, would suggest that.



2. Yes, conversations and letters involved "specific individuals and circumstances"; but that's not a good excuse to dismiss them. A talk with, say, Gurukula teachers in Nouvelle Mayapur, France, may be more relevant for teachers; while a conversation

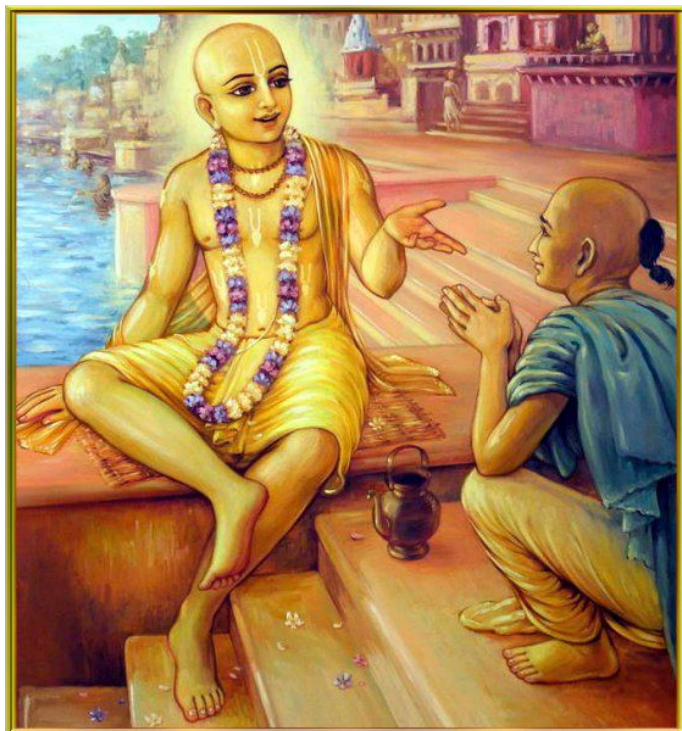


with GBC members may be more pertinent to top leaders; but we can't set aside *any exchange* as not instructive. We just need to apply a little discrimination and common sense to distinguish what's pertinent only to a particular person, and what instead has a broader application. Only a deranged person would, say,

suddenly travel to Germany after reading "**you shall have to go to Germany**" in a letter that Srila Prabhupada wrote to Syamasundara on 7 June 1968.

3. "Half a century ago." Apparently, the shelf life of Srila Prabhupada's instructions has expired, and we shouldn't "depend so heavily upon" them anymore. Like mozzarellas kept too long in the sun, the lectures, letters, and conversations are now rancid, rotten, and unfit for consumption. Fifty years ago, of course, was still Dvapara-yuga and what Srila Prabhupada said at that time has little use for us, poor

Kali-yuga humans. When Srila Prabhupada spoke, people lived a thousand years; the *yuga-dharma* was different; and Vedic kings ruled the Earth. So, his words have hardly any relevance for us, miserable contemporaries of the Trumps and the Putins. (Srila Prabhupada mentions a certain Nixon 468 times... I believe he was a monarch in Aryavarta and a distant relative of Jarasandha. No connection at all with us.)



So, fifty years have passed; should we just archive all lectures, letters, and conversations for good? Would these people also treat Lord Caitanya's instructions in the same way? After all, He spoke 500 years ago (500! That's 10 times 50!); how could His teachings to, say, Rupa Goswami have any importance for us? And, after all, it was just a *conversation*.⁸ Much better for us to rely exclusively on the *Manu-samhita* (which scholars consider about 2,000 old). That's the right source for us to establish a birth-

based, caste-centered, *smārta*-friendly *varṇāśrama* in ISKCON.

Branding Srila Prabhupada's Instructions as "Anecdotal" and Throwing Them Away

Someone writing under the cover of anonymity attacked a seminar I gave, in which I (fool that I am) quoted various Srila Prabhupada's instructions. He didn't like those quotes because they clashed with his imaginary pseudo-Vedic worldview, and so he wrote: "the speaker . . . need to go beyond the anecdotal quote approach." Google defines *anecdotal* as: "(of an account) not necessarily true or reliable, because based on personal accounts rather than facts or research." In other words, in simple terms, we need to reject Srila Prabhupada's words because they are no better than mere hearsay.

⁸ We should certainly also stop studying Krishna's message to Rukmini; after all, it was only a *letter* - and from 5,000 years ago!

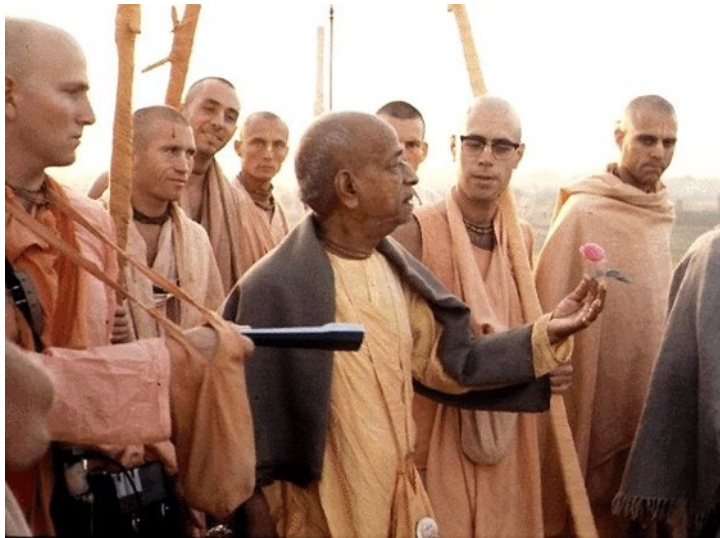
Cambridge Dictionary *uvaca*: "Anecdotal information is not based on facts or careful study" Srila Prabhupada didn't apply "careful study" of *śāstra*, and so what he says doesn't have much authority, because it's "not based on facts." In other words, Srila Prabhupada presumably, according to this person, was just speculating.

The Dictionary offers another definition of *anecdotal*: "based on reports or things someone saw rather than on proven facts." So, it doesn't matter that the lectures and conversations are all recorded and transcribed (and some even filmed). It doesn't matter that we have more than 6,000 *signed* letters... all this is just "anecdotal." I am sorry to repeat myself, but this is a crucial point: discrediting all this evidence is essential for the neo-*smārtas*. They can then jump over the Founder-*Ācārya* to the *real thing*, to "material *dharma-śāstra*" casteist best-sellers That's what the critic meant by saying that we "need to go beyond the anecdotal quote approach by diving deeper into deliberating the shastric basis of these vast topics."

Someone may doubt, "But could he simply mean that we should spend more time studying the *Bhagavatam* and the *Caitanya-caritamrita*?" My reply: "No, because then he would have no problem with Srila Prabhupada's instructions, which are perfectly in line with those books. He wouldn't call Srila Prabhupada's teachings *anecdotal*." There is no difference between the book *bhagavata* and the person *bhagavata*. Srila Prabhupada's activities in establishing and leading ISKCON are a continuation of *Caitanya-lila*. There is no incongruence or conflict between what Srila Prabhupada said and the original texts. Rather, what Srila Prabhupada spoke constitutes an essential tool to guide and illuminate our implementation of *śāstra*.



Those who wish to set aside Srila Prabhupada's words in lectures, letters, and conversations simply wish to *remove him as the authority for ISKCON*.



From the holy triad of *guru*, *sadhu* and *śāstra* we cannot dump the *guru* and just keep *śāstra*. Srila Prabhupada explains: "So we have to take knowledge from *śāstra*. And who will teach me *śāstra*? *Tad-vijñānārtham sa gurum evābhigacchet* [*Mundaka Upanisad* 1.2.12]. Go to guru." (Lecture on SB 6.1.42, Los

Angeles, 8 June 1976. I am sorry if this quote is "only" from a lecture...)

Please try to understand: Srila Prabhupada is the biggest obstacle to the neo-*smārtas*' plans. Yes, they constantly offer lip service to him - otherwise nobody in ISKCON would take them seriously - but it's all a charade, a smokescreen. In reality, they want to get rid of him, of his authority, because that's what stands in between them and their dream of a caste-conscious, bodily-obsessed ISKCON.

Srila Prabhupada is the biggest thorn in their flesh. As one removes a thorn with another thorn, they are trying to remove his influence using his own words in the books - twisted and taken out of context, of course. He is their nemesis, their archenemy; and their attempt to demean all his lectures, letters, and conversations is simply an aspect of their onslaught against him. They can't kill him physically, and so they can try to destroy his work. Therefore, they endeavor to erase his heritage.

See what's happening? They are creating doubt and eroding the faith of devotees in the validity of millions (literally millions) of Srila Prabhupada's words. The neo-*smārtas* are the enemies of the *sampradāya*. What's a *sampradāya*? A succession of *ācāryas*. By *ācāryas* we mainly indicate their teachings (not their physical remains).



As Srila Prabhupada is a pure representative of the *sampradāya*, an *apa-sampradāya* must delegitimize and discard his instructions to gain traction. You undermine the teachings of the Founder-*Ācārya*, shaming them as "anecdotal," and you discredit him and his sacred legacy. The ISKCON community loses its roots - and neo-*smārtism* triumphs.

ISKCON *Smārtas* & ISKCON *Prākṛta-sahajiyās*

Scholars separate the many *apa-sampradāyas* into two broad divisions, *smārtas* and *sahajiyās*, possessing diverging orientations and constituencies. The *smārtas* represent the caste-oriented, textual *brāhmaṇic* form, headed by members of the higher castes and characterized by elitism and nepotism. Sahajiyism, on the other hand, has been largely adopted by the people of the lower castes. Often influenced by erotic practices; they have been considered sentimental, morally weak, licentious, and mostly a religion for the ignorant and illiterate. These two groupings, of course, present within themselves a myriad of nuances, with countless subdivisions and degrees of deviancy, but this is their broad subdivision.



On the *smārta* side we find mundane religiosity intertwined with impersonalism (faith in the scriptural ritualistic codes but ultimately not in a personal God or in the purifying potency of His holy name). As it is materially contaminated, the *smārta* approach involves the exaggerate (even obsessive) focus on the body and its birth, diametrically opposed to the Gaudiya spirit and to the teachings of the *Gīta*. A strong sense of entitlement and of social stratification pervades the *smārta* culture. In it we observe a sustained, strenuous effort to perpetuate hierarchies and preserve privilege.

In *The Nectar of Devotion*, chapter five, Srila Prabhupada gives an example of such mindset: "In the Middle Ages, after the disappearance of Lord Caitanya's great associate Lord Nityānanda, a class of priestly persons claimed to be the descendants of Nityānanda, calling themselves the *gosvāmī* caste. They further claimed that the practice and spreading of devotional service belonged only to their particular class."

The *prākṛta-sahajiyās* are different. Generally unburdened from *smārta* arrogance, unfortunately they are also generally unburdened from rigorously following the true *ācāryas*, both in philosophy and practice. The etymology of the word '*sahajiyā*' offers



a glimpse into their fundamental problem: *saha-ja -saha*, with, coming along, plus *ja*, as in *janma*, generation - they may believe that *bhakti* can manifest spontaneously, without adherence to rigorous *sadhana* (or through some imaginary *sadhana*) and without following the standard disciplinary restrictions. Their spontaneity is material, *prākṛta-sahajiyā*. And so *sahajiyā* groups liberally include minstrels and misfits, in a kaleidoscopic ensemble of weirdness, speculation and, often but not always, loose morals. Some of them represent the sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll version of Vaisnavism. One fitting epithet they earned as a group is "imitationists," because they imitate stages of *bhakti* they have not reached.

And so you have those men who dress as women mimicking the *gopis* (*sakhibekhis*), imagining it as a path to higher esoteric realms of love. Then you have those (*bauls*) who may travel with 3-4 girlfriends from one "spiritual" jamboree to another... Of course, we can't just lump all of them together (just within *bauls*, for instance, there are many sects, exhibiting different degrees of asceticism), but we can classify the whole *sahajiyā* phenomenon as an assemblage of variegated groups promoting different sorts of (generally) watered-down processes meant to achieve (or simply resemble) the higher echelons of devotional ecstasy.

Srila Prabhupada said: "After the disappearance of the Gosvāmīns, about 250 years after, the things became most ridiculous . . . *Prākṛta-sahajiyā* means taking things very easily. They thought that Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa is just like a boy and girl's lusty affairs. And in this way, they took it that sex life as religion." (Lecture, Los Angeles, 7 Feb 1969)

"They will smoke cigarette; at the same time they will play *rasa-līlā*. This is *sahajiyā*. This is *sahajiyā*. They will do all nonsense; still, they will become God, imitation of God." (Morning Walk, Bombay, 6 May 1974) The hallmark of sahajiyism is taking the path of *bhakti* cheaply, lowering moral standards, and neglecting theological rigor. Such groups, in differing degrees, claim some connection with Lord Caitanya, but they all rigorously deviate from the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of the Six Goswamis.

Srila Prabhupada, despite his general condemnation, indicates that we should at least appreciate that they chant the holy names, although we shouldn't keep their company: "The *prākṛta-sahajiyās* generally chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, yet they are attached to women, money and intoxication. Although such persons may chant the holy name of the Lord, they are not yet properly purified. Such people should be respected within one's mind, but their association should be avoided." (NOI 5, purport) That they "should be respected within one's mind" doesn't mean that we should assimilate *sahajiyā* attitudes within ISKCON. In fact, we should do our best to protect Srila Prabhupada's Society from *sahajiyā* extravagance.



ISKCON *Prākṛta-sahajiyās*

In ISKCON we have some *kīrtanīyas* that manifest *sahajiyā* behaviors. (With emphasis on "some" - other *kīrtanīyas* may be very strict and saintly followers.) To their credit, they have acquired - in this or previous lives - some attraction for the holy name; but some have also acquired a strong attraction for associating with unmarried women. I am not sure how much spiritual potency these *sahajiyās*' chanting possesses, but a few may certainly possess the potency to make girls pregnant, especially out of wedlock, which also takes some *sakti*. (Again, to be clear: these comments apply only to some of the self-styles *kīrtanīyas*, not to all.)

These *sahajiyās* might claim spiritual allegiance to Aindra Prabhu, but do not emulate his austerities and self-control. They hardly speak of philosophy as they can't be bothered to study Srila Prabhupada's books, but at least they regularly shave their heads and faces (just kidding). Their influence in ISKCON manifests, figuratively speaking, "from the bottom," through some sort of populist dynamic.

They especially attract the youth on various continents, sometimes becoming the teenagers' role models.

Such *sahajiyās* may utter, with dreamy eyes, "transcendental platitudes" such as, "The holy name is everything..." but ten minutes later they may be trapped by *jihva-vegām* and *udaropastha-vegām* (the urges of the tongue, stomach, and genitals). They are generally "institutionally agnostic" and float around taking as much as possible from ISKCON without any desire to reciprocate by taking any responsibility in the mission. They insist that the institution is "external" and not worth serving. For the third time: I am not talking about all *kīrtanīyas*. Various serious *kīrtanīyas* are providing effective, impactful leadership in the *sankīrtana* movement in powerful and innovative ways. So, we shouldn't take *kīrtanīyas* as synonymous to *sahajiyās*, but in some cases we do see the influence of the *sahajiyā* mentality and the manifestation of the *sahajiyā* behavior.

The *sahajiyās* are instrumental in watering down ISKCON's standards of *sādhana* and civilized behavior, but at least they don't threaten a schism because they don't organize themselves into a recognizable hierarchical structure (their only social hierarchy is their degree of popularity).

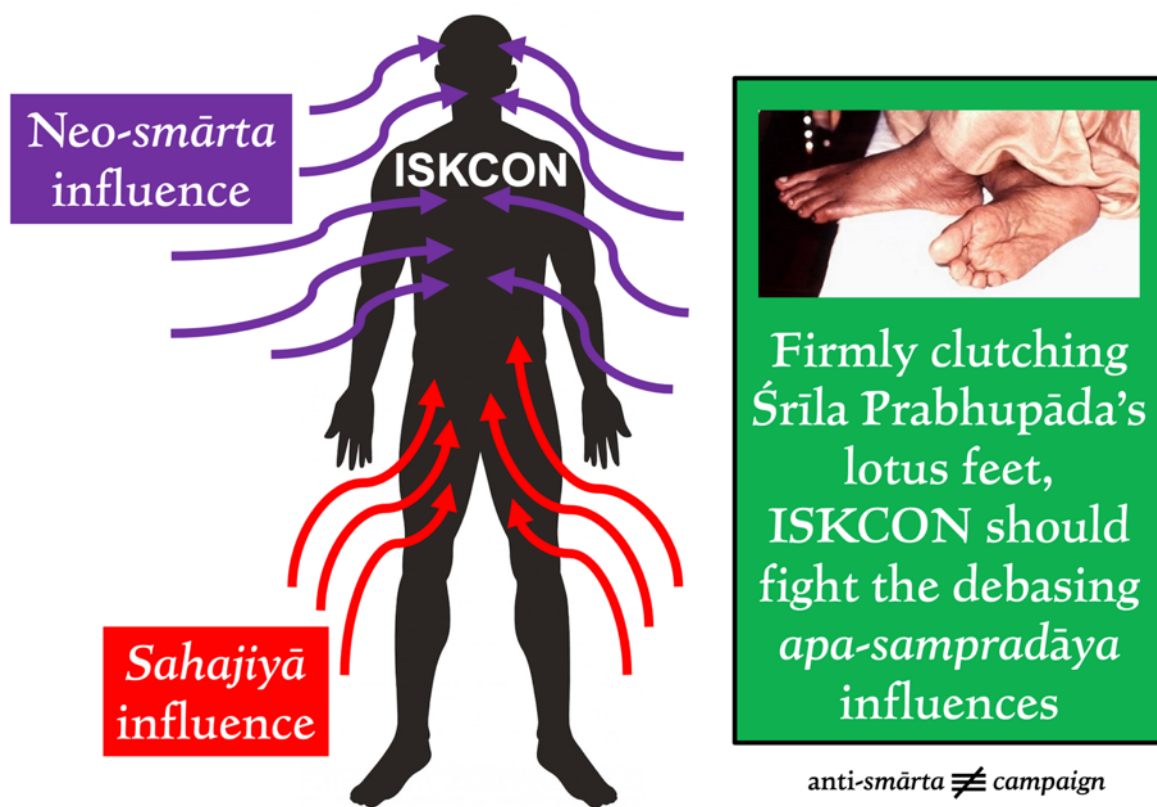
ISKCON *Smārtas*

The neo-*smārtas* are a different breed. Generally pious in behavior, prim in matrimonial interactions, and puritanically religious in conduct, *smārtas* pose the distinguished insidiousness of being hardly distinguishable from loyal devotees. Whereas *sahajiyās* are wild and disorganized; *smārtas* are prissy and systematic in pursuing their goals. They work tirelessly to impose their concoctions on ISKCON. When opposed, they threaten to tear ISKCON apart. Because *smārtas*, on a gross level, do control their senses, they can be significantly productive and generate a substantial amount of output in the form of streams of vocal tirades, publications (printed or online), and steady torrents of logorrheic (practically unreadable) emails. Many devotees despise them not only for being deviants, but also because of being excruciatingly boring!

They have a lot to say and keep saying it non-stop. Because, presumably, in the previous life they were proud *brāhmaṇas*, in this life they try to impose their will on others as if per sacred right. As in previous existences they might have been adroit at rubbing elbows with the powerful (kings and other aristocrats), neo-

smārtas easily infiltrate ISKCON's chambers of power. They are seen as traditionalists - with all their talk of Vedic-this and Vedic-that - and therefore many innocent ISKCON members don't recognize their *apa-sampradāyic* status. They are even mistaken for noble reformers, while in fact they are just *deformers*.

Less knowledgeable devotees may even take the neo-*smārtas* as the true benefactors of ISKCON, working to purify the movement from debasing influences. And it's true that the neo-*smārtas* stress morality and social probity (to the point of hawkishness and repressive policing), but they are powerfully and insidiously eroding Lord Caitanya's unique brand of liberality, inclusivity, equal opportunity, and spiritual egalitarianism. Despite their decades of studying Srila Prabhupada books, of reading other *śāstras*, and of learning Sanskrit, they don't seem to have assimilated that we are not these bodies and that we shouldn't try to fit Vaisnavas and Vaisnavis into casteist, artificial, materialistic, and outdated social conventions.



As the graphic indicates, they work to infiltrate the head of our Society, the power centers; they also moved towards seizing and blocking the heart; the heart being the pure, compassionate, and empowering teachings of Srila Prabhupada and Caitanya Mahaprabhu. (Have you noticed that the neo-*smārtas* hardly even speak about love?) As a result, neo-*smārtas* pervade, sway, and heavily influence various

administrative and advisory entities, specifically in India. The "ISKCON India Scholars Board," for instance, functions as their fortress and propaganda apparatus.

The neo-*smārta* concept of *varṇāśrama* is a *tamo-rajasic* mishmash of anachronistic norms and fanatic impositions. Tamasic because lacking awareness of reality (both scriptural and environmental); rajasic because it's pervaded by rigid but contrived hierarchies, a sense of entitlement and privilege based on the body. Such views repulse thoughtful devotees and disgust the thinking public.

In this brief overview we should also mention their sending of missionaries to zealously evangelize their brand of close-mindedness, their "bunker-*varṇāśrama*." These gospels often clash with the existing local ISKCON branches and create unnecessary tensions and problems. They don't seem to have yet formally, physically infiltrated the Governing Body Commission (GBC) by placing their people directly in it, but, through their intimidatory tactics and schismatic threats, they exert an extraordinary amount of pressure and influence on the GBC.

Srila Prabhupada Was Aware of the *Apa-sampradāyas*' Influence on ISKCON



The morning walk exchange below shows that Srila Prabhupada acknowledged that the *apa-sampradāya* contamination had indeed seeped into ISKCON, even in his presence. He begins by mentioning the Vrindavana *sahajiyās*, but then the dialogue shifts to how those tendencies were adopted in ISKCON. He speaks mainly about *sahajiyās*, because the focus of the dialogue was an outbreak of *sahajiyism*, but *smārtaism* is also noted:

Prabhupāda: Many *sahajiyās*, they requested me, "Sir, why you are going? You are in Vṛndāvana. Continue your *bhajana*. What is the use of preaching?" . . . *Sahajiyā* means they take very easily: "I am . . . everything is all right. Now I am perfect" . . . You are attracted to *rāsa-līlā* means you have got sex desire. That's all. And actually... what you said, that one girl?

Rāmeśvara: He said one girl, she was... killed her baby.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Abortion. In Europe.

Prabhupāda: This is their business.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: And now she's the leader here. Now she's the leader of the women's group of these *sahajiyā* parties . . .

Prabhupāda: This *rāsa-līlā* is for the person who is completely purified . . . When one is impure, he should not think of. That is stated in the *Bhāgavatam*.

Rāmeśvara: In this they have misunderstood your Kṛṣṇa Book.

Prabhupāda: They must have misunderstood. They are all rascals . . .

Rāmeśvara: We should try to save them.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Yes. There are so many devotees involved—over a hundred . . .

Rāmeśvara: Who knows the names?

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Pradyumna . . . He goes around everywhere (laughs) investigating the *sahajiyās*. I hope he doesn't become won over.

Prabhupāda: He was.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Yes, I know, that's why he's doing it. He was once like that.

Prabhupāda: He was *smārta*.

Rāmeśvara: *Smārta. Paṇḍita*. You used to call him *Paṇḍita*.

Tamāla Kṛṣṇa: Sometimes Prabhupāda would tell him he was a *smārta* . . .

Prabhupāda: *Āula, bāula, kartābhajā, neḍā, daraveśa, sāni sahajiyā, sakhībhekī, smārta, jāta-gosāñi*. They are all counted in one group.

(Morning Walk, Los Angeles, 6 June 1976)

And this was all already happening in the presence of the Founder-*Ācārya*.

Apa-sampradāya Contamination: "It Is Coming Since a Long Time"

More evidence of *apa-sampradāya* intrusions and Srila Prabhupada's deep concern:

Prabhupāda: Those who are neophytes, they will be always in danger . . . Those who are neophyte, they are always in danger . . . Vṛndāvana, there are so many dangerous . . . And because he has imitated the dress of Rūpa Gosvāmī, mālā, tilaka, and he's manufacturing *biḍī*—he's higher. This is going on.

Pṛthu-putra: Oh, I see.

Prabhupāda: Therefore Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has condemned these rascals - that *kali-celā*, "the disciple of Kali" . . . So we have to be guided by our predecessor *ācāryas*. Then we shall be saved. Otherwise we are condemned . . . as soon as he deviates -

yasyāprasādān na gatiḥ kuto 'pi. He is finished. That has happened to Nitāi . . . So be careful of these rascals.

Pṛthu-putra: Oh, we haven't come in contact with any of these rascals.

Prabhupāda: No, this Nitāi and others, they have . . . This is... it's not new thing. It is coming since a long time . . . These *sahajiyās* will come out of so many devotees. What can be done? From my Guru Mahārāja's disciples, so many *sahajiyās* came. These are called *sahajiyās*. Very easily they capture thing. So my Guru Mahārāja used to say: "When my disciples will be *sahajiyā*, it will be more dangerous." He used to say like that. Take things very easily. You know that Puruṣottama, supposed to be my Godbrother? . . . He has poisoned this Nitāi.

Pṛthu-putra: Oh. Is it because we have the desire coming in contact with such person that we contact them, like Nitāi contacting that Puruṣottama?

Prabhupāda: **You may not desire, but if you are not strong, you'll be misled by these rascals.**

(Conversation, Bhubaneswar, 28 Jan 1977)

These are only excerpts from a longer exchange in which Srila Prabhupada describes in detail the deviant practices of the *sahajiyās* (smoking, illicit sex, etc.). My only comment at this point: the pollution from *smārtaism* is less gross - as they don't seem to engage in external, physical immorality - but therefore they are even more insidious. Behind the pious, religious facade, festers a deep animosity against Gaudiya-vaisnava inclusiveness; an obsessive ambition to paralyze Mahaprabhu's mission with casteist superstitions.

After Srila Prabhupada's departure *sahajiyā* and *smārta* attitudes had forty-six years to infiltrate ISKCON. Isn't high time to give serious attention to the problem?

Pervasive Impersonalism

This is not really a metaphor, but a technical, "behind the mask" description. We often hear devotees calling "impersonalist" anyone they don't like - as a general insult. This is not the case here. I am using the expression as a specific depiction of below-the-ground neo-*smārta* attitudes and beliefs. In their actions and theory neo-*smārtas* show that they don't fully accept the purifying power of Krishna and His holy names. It's not enough for them. This is a fundamentally impersonalist approach:



"[A] *smārta-brāhmaṇa* - that is, one who strictly follows the Vedic principles on the mundane platform. On the mundane platform one cannot believe that *prasāda* is transcendental, that Govinda is the original form of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, or that a Vaiṣṇava is a liberated person. These transcendental considerations are out of the ordinary Vedic scholar's jurisdiction . . . These so-called followers of Vedānta philosophy consider the Absolute Truth to be impersonal. They also believe that a person born in a particular caste cannot change his caste until he dies and takes rebirth." (Cc Madhya, 12.180, purport)

Devotees can be deceived because externally the *smārtas* may resemble staunch Vaisnavas: "Unfortunately many so-called *gosvāmīs* are on the platform of *smārta-viddhi*, yet they

try to pass as *gosvāmi-viddhi*, and thus the people are cheated." (Cc Madhya, 25.121, purport)

In a commentary on the *Mukunda-mālā-stotra*, Srila Prabhupada warns that impersonalism remains a risk for devotees too absorbed in outdated liturgies and procedures at the expense of cultivating the essential spirit: "Ordinary devotees bound up by the formalities of Vedic rites cannot enter deep into such confidential loving service to the Lord, and thus their realization remains imperfect. Sometimes they even fall victim to the calamity of impersonalism." (MM 2, purport)

In a similar vein, Srila Prabhupada explains that many people who *appear* as Vaisnavas are in fact impersonalists.

Prabhupāda: You'll find among *smārta-brāhmaṇas* they are also some of them Vaiṣṇavas, but they are impersonalists.

Prof. Hopkins: . . . You would say that those, those *smārtas*, say, and I know *smārta brāhmaṇas* who are worshipers of Viṣṇu . . . you would say they still are impersonalists in some ultimate sense, because at some point they would deny . . .

Prabhupāda: No, it is very difficult to pick them out. Most of the so-called Vaiṣṇavas, they are impersonalists.

(Conversation, Philadelphia, 13 July 1975)

The above quote, I believe, should terrify and alarm us. Impersonalism can express itself in many ways, such as lack of faith in Krishna, in the power of His holy name, and in the potency of remembering Him. During the ceremonies of initiation, we all sing this verse from the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*:

*om apavitraḥ pavitra vā sarvāvasthām gato 'pi vā
yaḥ smaret puṇḍarikākṣam sa bahyābhyantaraḥ śuciḥ*

Srila Prabhupada explains: "*yaḥ smaret puṇḍarikākṣam*. Either he is in the bodily concept of life or he is in the spiritual concept of life, either he is contaminated or he is liberated—in any condition, one who remembers Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu, *bahyābhyantaram*, he immediately becomes purified internally and externally." (Initiation lecture, Los Angeles, 1 Dec 1968)

But for *smārtas* remembrance of Krishna is not enough; they say that people from certain groups must take another birth for full purification. Neo-*smārtas*, both in theory and in practice, adopt the impersonalist attitude of not trusting the potency of Krishna and His holy name in purifying any residual contamination. There is always something missing, something lacking, especially for women.



The War on Women

"We are Vaisnavas." Srila Prabhupada writes, "We are not concerned with male or female position in life. That is simply bodily concept of life. It is not spiritual. Whether one is male or female, it doesn't matter, simply chant Hare Krishna and follow the four regulative principles and your life will be perfect." (Letter to Jennifer, 15 Feb 1975)

"We are not concerned with male or female position," but the neo-*smārtas* are *extremely* concerned; to the point of obsession; to the point of living in a state of constant hostility against Vaisnavis. Some of them can't even bring themselves to utter the term "Vaisnavi" while referring to ISKCON women, but insist on calling them "female," a demeaning, biological address.

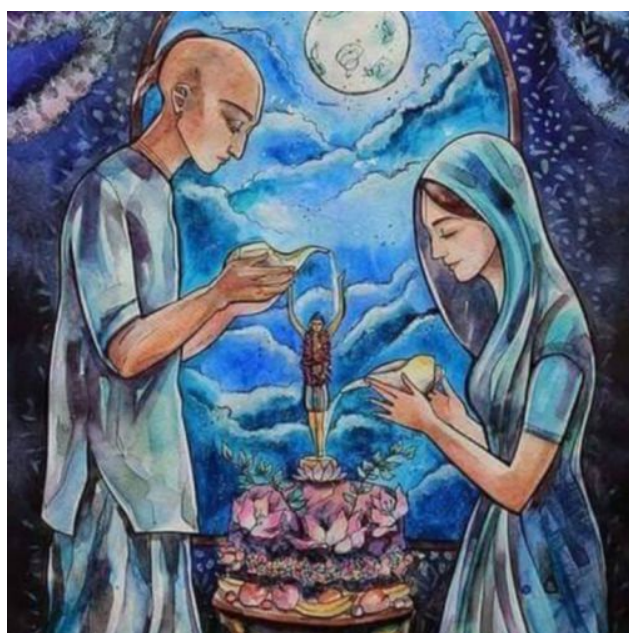


Neo-*smārta* often seem to consider women as vicious enemies to be subdued and overpowered, but they won't admit it. They will rationalize, "No, no, we simply want to protect them, as Srila Prabhupada and the *Manu-samhita* recommend. There is no enmity, we only feel an intense concern about the degradation of modern society, the debasing influences of the West, and the threat of feminism on Vedic life." But Srila Prabhupada knew about "Vedic life" much better than the neo-*smārtas*. He was empowered to introduce a Krishna conscious Society all over the world, a community in which both men and women are trained and encouraged to reach perfection: "The life of a human being is a chance to prepare oneself to go

back to Godhead . . . Thus in the system of *varṇāśrama-dharma* every man and woman is trained for this purpose.” (SB 1.19.4, purport)

Yes, Srila Prabhupada stressed protection of women, but he was inspired by a benevolent disposition, a heart of gold for suffering humanity; not by elitist pride, bodily consciousness, male chauvinism, or pathological misogyny. What he recommended was reasonable, mature, profound, and scalable. He was realistic and adaptable, not fanatically unbending. If we really wish to see Vaisnavis being protected, we should focus on creating first-class men, not on blaming women because their personality and *śakti* makes immature males feel inadequate.

"If There Is First-Class Men, Then Whole Question Is Solved"



Srila Prabhupada recipe for family harmony and progress is as simple as it is neglected: "We want to raise first-class men . . . First-class man means with qualification who can control the mind, control the senses, always very cleansed and truthful, very simple, full of all kinds of knowledge, practical application in life, then to have full knowledge of God—these are the characteristics of first-class man . . . Woman should remain dependent in childhood upon first-class father, in

youthhood upon first-class husband and in old age upon first-class son . . . In the *śāstra* it is said: 'Unless you can create first-class man, don't beget children.'" (Conversation, Chicago, 5 July 1975)

When men are dysfunctional, violent, exploitative, or irresponsible, women must take care of their own well-being and rely on their own strength. How can anyone blame them? Why neo-*smārtas* should insultingly brand women as 'feminists'⁹ or

⁹ According to *vocabulary.com*, "A feminist is someone who supports equal rights for women." This would encompass Srila Prabhupada, who famously said: "**We keep women separately from men, that's all. Otherwise, the rights are the same.**" (Interview, Toronto, 18 June 1976)" In short, feminism manifests in *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* *gunas*. Obviously, Srila Prabhupada supported feminism in *sattva* and beyond.

'cultural Marxists' if men (including devotees) are often incompetent as fathers, husbands, and sons (and at times even as gurus)?

I never heard a woman complaining that her father was a first-class, loving, responsible, protective parent.

I never heard a woman complaining that her husband was a first-class man, a caring and effective provider, a steadfast, considerate, and spiritually advanced partner.

I never heard a woman complaining that her grown-up sons were first-class adults, nicely providing for her economic, emotional, and social needs, affording her a reliable refuge in her late years.

My observation: in most cases young girls crave an attentive and nurturing guardianship by their father; in most cases women do wish to get married to a good, reliable man; in most cases women do wish to have children and spend time with them; in most cases women desire to have a serene and sheltered old age; in most cases women want the same things the neo-*smārtas* so mawkishly and garrulously advocate. But then, why such paroxysms of bitterness from the neo-*smārtas*? Why so much bile, vitriol, and rage against women? The real issue is the shortage of first-class men, *not of women who wish to be properly and appropriately protected*.

Brahmānanda: Actually, they [women] are just feeling frustrated, because it is a fact that woman has been exploited by the men. So now they want to counteract this.

Prabhupāda: No, we don't say that woman should be exploited by men. We say the man should be responsible and give protection to woman.

Brahmānanda: But they feel so angry from the exploitation that they cannot accept that actually a man could protect them.

Prabhupāda: That is bad experience. But the ideal is different. Ideal is that man must be first-class and he must be responsible to take care of the woman, and she should be given all protection, all necessities. That is the duty of man . . . And because there is no first-class man to take charge of the woman, they are declaring independence . . . So if there is first-class men, then whole question is solved. (Conversation, Chicago, 9 July 1975)

The concept is so simple that even a six-year old can grasp it: "**if there is first-class men, the whole question is solved.**" The neo-*smārtas*, if they were honest and psychologically balanced, would focus their crusades on men, not on women. If they were reasonable, they would recognize that the *Manu-samhita's* injunction about protecting women is an instruction for men, not for women. Their attitude towards women is weirdly irascible, not benign or caring. Their approach to women

is antagonistic, not altruistic (and, frankly speaking, not very manly). Such a combative mood reveals their puerility, their insecurity, as their disastrous "GHQ" campaign revealed.¹⁰

An Overwhelming Inferiority Complex



The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *inferiority complex* as "an acute sense of personal inferiority often resulting either in timidity or through overcompensation in exaggerated aggressiveness." Wikipedia explains: "A superiority complex is a defense mechanism that develops over time to help a person cope with feelings of inferiority . . . Individuals with this complex . . . may treat others in an imperious, overbearing, and even aggressive manner."

Although they sound diametrically opposite, both superiority and inferiority complexes stem from a feeling of inadequacy; a feeling that could be concealed even to oneself. People affected may outwardly present themselves as true reformers and saviors (trying to show that they know better than anyone else), but they avoid the real work of reforming themselves, their affected psyche, and their childish attitudes. In the neo-*smārtas* this tendency is often evident (practically to everyone but themselves), and often manifests as their superiority/inferiority complex towards women.

Vedic culture addresses all anthropological levels of the individual: physical, psychological, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual; but the pseudo-Vedic neo-*smārtas* generally aren't ready to explore the psychic and emotional dimensions. Especially when it comes to their sexual attraction or natural need for womanly companionship (which involves showing vulnerability) neo-*smārta* men may tend to exaggerate their defense mechanisms, boosting them to the point of intense,

¹⁰ GHQ stood for the *General Headquarters* of a radical anti-feministic alliance. For more details: <https://vaishnaviministry.org/anti-vaishnavi-ghq/>

irrational antagonism. Srila Prabhupada writes about this; and let's remember that the "inexperienced devotees" he mentions may be 75-year-olds who have been in the movement for 50 years, but have no experience of inner work, no experience of introspecting and analyzing their deeper motivations:

"[S]ometimes in the neophyte stage of devotional service, in order to withstand the attack of Maya and remain strong under all conditions of temptation, young or inexperienced devotees will adopt an attitude against those things or persons possibly harmful, threatening to their tender devotional creeper. They may even over-indulge in such feelings just to protect themselves." (Letter to Lynne Ludwig, 30 April 1973)

Women can be perceived (and can function) as *māyā* for men, as opportunities for distraction, deviation, and degradation. Although truly Vedic men see women as mothers, some pseudo-Vedic neo-*smārtas* indulge in a lifelong war against them (even after marrying one) - misusing scriptural references as their ammunition.

In their elitist frenzy, neo-*smārtas* mostly target women, relentlessly militating to impose artificial restrictions on them. If you have two X chromosomes, you are a threat to them, an adversary to be socially delegitimized and institutionally marginalized. You may be a staunch ISKCON woman who performed decades of first-rate devotional service; you may be utterly loyal, exceptionally discriminating, an exemplary daughter, mother, and wife; you may be a Sanskrit scholar and have a Bhaktivedanta degree... but those two X chromosomes, those two all-powerful X chromosomes irredeemably dooms you as a second-class citizen of ISKCON, for

What are those foolish girls down there, my wife and her friend, talking about?

So, this is your husband. How is it being married to a neo-smārta?

It's OK - if you can tolerate his huge superiority complex and his idea that, being a female, I am barely human.

anti-smārta ≠ campaign

Śrīla Prabhupāda, wedding lecture, Boston, 6 May 1969:

"The husband will help the wife, the wife will help the husband in advancing in Krishna consciousness."

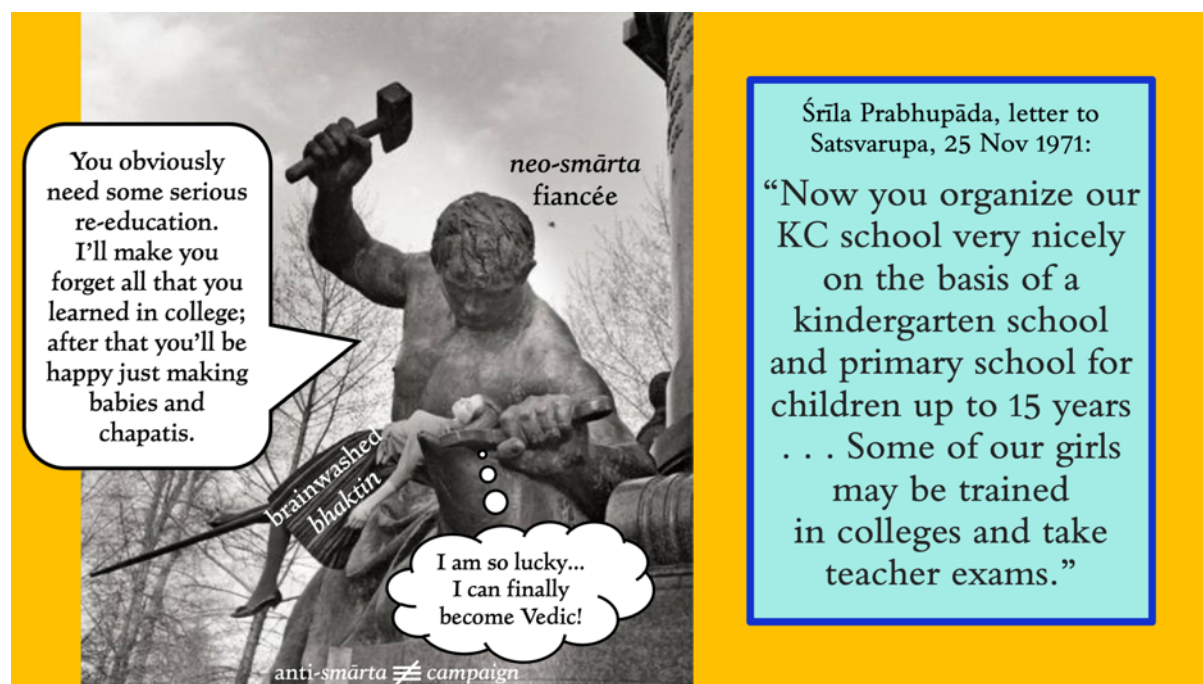
whom many doors are closed, and many services are precluded. Sorry. Try next life (but don't bring two X chromosomes again).

The role, potential, and service engagement of women - also referred to as *strī-dharma* - is a terrain of intense discord between neo-*smārtas* and Gaudiya loyalists; but neo-*smārta* attitudes have very little to do with Krishna consciousness.

Fear of Educated Women

Srila Prabhupada always encouraged devotees to enter the schools and colleges, especially to recruit intelligent people (both male and female): **"It is most important if you arrange lectures and kirtans at the schools and colleges because the more intelligent young boys and girls of your country are very much eager to understand this Krishna Consciousness Movement."** (Letter to Nayanabhirama, 26 Oct 1970)

But men cannot include girls if afraid of qualified women; if they feel inadequate and terrified by the possibility of talking with sharp, discerning ladies. What to speak of marrying a smart woman! Neo-*smārtas* and their followers often feel insecure and therefore vigorously preach that women should be forcibly kept as inferior and uneducated. (By the way, the present trend is just the opposite: globally, colleges and universities now enroll just 88 men for every 100 women. "What the world is coming to!" Cries the neo-*smārta*, afraid of the decrease macho power...)



Weakly men, petrified in front of educated women, may look for semi-literate, economically dependent, simple-minded female companions; but for Srila Prabhupada educated devotees - male and females - were a precious asset, an essential aspect of his mission. He said: **"We have got so many temples, and we have got our temple here also, New York. And there are preachers also. We have got good preachers, and educated boys and girls."** (Arrival lecture, New York, 5 April) It was a point of pride for him, not of terror.

Srila Prabhupada wrote to a Godbrother: **"As you know the western boys and girls are educated and trained up in practical life. They are spreading this movement better than any Indian could do."** (Letter to Turya Shramya Maharaja, 8 April 1970) So, Krishna is the quality in man and woman. Let's hope and pray that our movement gets filled to the brim with **"intelligent boys and girls,"** lifetime students and teachers of Krishna-*bhakti*.

Book Distribution: Against *Strī-dharma*



ISKCON Vaisnavi flagrantly transgressing strī-dharma

In another odd essay produced by the "ISKCON India Scholars Board,"¹¹ the author (who is simultaneously a *brahmacari* and, apparently, also an authority on women's issues) attempts to delegitimize and eventually stop women from publicly distributing Srila Prabhupada's books. Why? Because it supposedly contravenes *strī-dharma*, the duties of women, and because it was only a "compromise" and a "concession" by Srila Prabhupada - who was "forced by circumstances."

Brahmacari uvaca: "We may have to compromise some *dharmas* if we are forced by circumstances. For example, Śrīla Prabhupāda engaged his female disciples in public book distribution, a task that has not been sanctioned by the *varṇāśrama-dharma* institution for women. But because it was not possible to change the free mixing scenario of the Western countries overnight, Śrīla Prabhupāda made a concession for it. However, by writing and preaching about *strī-dharma*, he did want his female disciples to gradually take up traditional roles of *strī-dharma*."

¹¹ "No trace of racism, sexism or 'homophobia' in Śrīla Prabhupāda's teachings."

As an aside, here we have another version of the "helpless Srila Prabhupada," a favorite neo-*smārta* fabrication. Whatever the Founder-*Ācārya* did which clashes with their ingrained sexism, they relapse into their denigratory (and fictional) version of Srila Prabhupada, someone "forced by circumstances," like a small, rudderless vessel lost at sea, tossed around by the waves. (More on this fantasy later.)

Although a full book (or preferably a full stand-up comedy) could be written on the above whacky sentence by the *strī-dharma*-expert *brahmacari*, here I will only make two points:

1. About all this alleged "writing and preaching about *strī-dharma*" by Srila Prabhupada: in the ocean of all his recorded words - books, lecture, letters, and conversations - the expression "*strī-dharma*" is found only once, and not even spoken by him. It's in the Sanskrit of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.9.27, a verse that lists topics Bhismadeva instructed Maharaja Yudhisthira about (a verse which doesn't say anything specific about *strī-dharma*, it just mentions it). So much for all this "writing and preaching about *strī-dharma*."

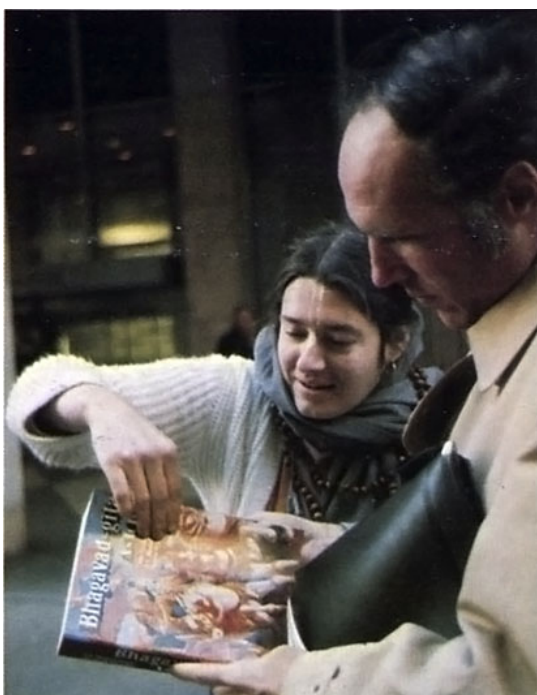
Of course, Srila Prabhupada, as the world instructor, spoke abundantly about the duties of humanity at large, about the duties of men, and about the duties of women, but between what he envisioned as *strī-dharma* and what the neo-*smārtas* think of *strī-dharma*, there is a gulf of difference.



*I don't have updated info, but between 2007 & 2012, the then Bhaktin Radhika Metha had already distributed more than 228,000 books and had been the world's number one book distributor. (And all against *strī-dharma*.)*

2. About book distribution, allegedly being "a task that has not been sanctioned by the *varṇāśrama-dharma* institution for women," let's start with an historical note. The *dharma-sāstras* meant to regulate the details of the *varnas* and the *asramas* were written before the invention of the press. At that time producing books was a very costly and laborious affair, as they were copied by hand by scribes. These precious artifacts were available only in closely guarded libraries and in private collections. On top of that, illiteracy was much more common than today. Therefore, in ancient times nobody - neither man nor woman - was doing "public book distribution," openly selling literature in the street. Thus, the statement that distributing books was "a task that has not been sanctioned by the *varṇāśrama-dharma* institution for women" doesn't make any sense. Public book distribution wasn't "sanctioned" for anyone, not just women. Just like, say, driving a car or using a computer wasn't "sanctioned" for anyone.

Much more importantly, Srila Prabhupada never said anything even remotely indicating that he wanted his women followers to eventually stop distributing his books. So much for book distribution being a "compromise" and a "concession" "forced by circumstances." Just the opposite! Once, for instance, an ISKCON leader had stopped women from distributing books and had instead brought them to serve on a farm. Srila Prabhupada intervened:



Gauri Dasi in action; Srila Prabhupada wrote: "Your sankirtana reports are very encouraging, especially that one girl, Gauri dasi, who has set an all ISKCON women's record of 108 big books." (Letter to Rupanuga, 18 Dec 1974)

"So far as the woman distributors who have left New York and Boston Temples and have gone to New Vrindaban, they should return immediately and resume their original service. In Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's Movement, everyone is preacher, whether man or woman it doesn't matter. I do not know why Kirtananda Maharaj is encouraging our woman devotees not to go out on Sankirtan for book distribution. Everyone should go out." (Letter to Karandhara, 6 Oct 1973)

This offers yet another example of the "ISKCON India Scholars Board" directly preaching against the vision of the Founder-Ācārya. (Among the other eleven board members, apparently none of them told this

brahmacari: "What the heck are you talking about? Is your 'scholarship' so abysmal that you don't even know that Srila Prabhupada *loved* to see his followers - men and women - distributing transcendental knowledge to the suffering souls? What do you think, that disseminating the teachings of Krishna and Prabhupada is a mundane activity based on the body, based on one's gender?")

In Srila Prabhupada's letter quoted above, a significant sentence is **"In Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's Movement, everyone is preacher, whether man or woman it doesn't matter."** This graphically illustrates the clash between his vision and the vision of the neo-*smārtas*. For Srila Prabhupada, until there is a **"Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's Movement"** worth of its name both men and women shall preach. It's not a matter of East or West, or of the social climate of the '70s, the '80s, the '90s, the 2020's, the 2050's, of this century or of the next. Srila Prabhupada writes: **"Please convey that I extend all blessings to those boys and girls who are trying to distribute our books even under difficult conditions."** (Letter to Jagadisa, 8 Jan 1974) It's simply the *nature* of the *sankirtana* movement to engage all its adherents to spread the glories of Krishna through all available means, despite the **"difficult conditions"** (such as the neo-*smārta* propaganda).



Real strī-dharma in Hong Kong

Srila Prabhupada also wrote: **"with great happiness I have read your figures of amount of books sold during three-day period, December 22-24, 1972. It is scarcely believable that more than 17,100 books could have been sold by one temple in three days! . . . people . . . can see that our boys and girls, devotees, are so much sincere and serious to distribute the message of Krsna consciousness . . . So I am so much pleased upon all of the boys and girls in Los Angeles and all over the world who are understanding and appreciating this unique quality of our transcendental literature and voluntarily they are going out to distribute despite all circumstances of difficulty. By this effort alone they are assured to go back to home, back to Godhead."** (Letter to Ramesvara, 9 Jan 1973) (I mean, assuming, of course, that women can go back to Godhead.)

The *brahmacari* believes that Srila Prabhupada "did want his female disciples to gradually take up traditional roles of *strī-dharma*." What's that? Remaining illiterate and barefooted, constantly in the kitchen and always pregnant, starting at thirteen?



I have no personal animosity toward this *brahmacarī*; he may be just acting as an unwitting spokesman for the obscurantist mentality typical of the gynophobic neo-*smārtas*.

Fortunately, that warped mentality can be easily fixed in two steps: 1. a little reincarnation in a female body; 2. practicing vigorous book distribution in that body.

"As Good as Their Brothers"

Fact: Srila Prabhupada wanted his lady disciples (and by extension all his future lady followers) to be as sharp and prepared for high-stakes intellectual work as their male counterparts. He wrote to one of his leaders:

"[N]ow we should increase our study of our literatures, so that we can answer the scholars and philosophers who will be coming forward as our movement attracts their attention. So you should carefully study our books very thoroughly . . . It is most essential that all the initiated devotees study our books and learn this philosophy very well . . . I hope in Buffalo center you will ask all the boys and girls to follow this method, because henceforward we will have to face many scholars and philosophers to stabilize our Kṛṣṇa Consciousness movement." (Letter to Rupanuga, 17 Feb 1970)

The neo-*smārta* idea that the Founder-*Ācārya* wanted his women followers to function as barely literate marionettes and unthinking patsies of men is a total fabrication. If you hang around ISKCON long enough, you will hear so much bogus neo-*smārtas* propaganda that leadership - in its many forms - is never for women. But the highest leadership in a true *varṇāśrama* society is executed by the *brāhmaṇas* who distribute knowledge and speak on behalf of God. Srila Prabhupada wished that his "boys and girls" perform such a role:

"It is not very difficult task to become representative of Kṛṣṇa or God. Simply you have to act. So all these boys and girls who are preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness, they are all representatives of Kṛṣṇa." (Conversation, Indore, 5 Dec 1970)



Is there anything higher, in terms of leadership, that being a *representative of God*? God is the supreme leader, His representatives on Earth denote the highest echelons of leadership in society. Not only that, Srila Prabhupada sharply and publicly criticized those who opposed engaging both men and women in missionary activities:

"An *ācārya* who comes for the service of the Lord cannot be expected to conform to a stereotype [and the neo-*smārtas* are the epitome of stereotype], for he must find the ways and means by which Kṛṣṇa consciousness may be spread. Sometimes jealous persons criticize the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement because it engages equally both boys and girls in distributing love of Godhead. [I wonder who were these "jealous persons," but I know to whom such epithet may apply today] . . . since both the boys and girls are being trained to become preachers, those girls are not ordinary girls but are as good as their brothers who are preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness. [This is anathema for the neo-*smārtas*, pure heresy.] Therefore, to engage both boys and girls in fully transcendental activities is a policy intended to spread the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. These jealous fools who criticize the intermingling of boys and girls will simply have to be satisfied with their own foolishness because they cannot think of how to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness by adopting ways and means that are favorable for this purpose. Their stereotyped methods will never help spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness." (Cc Adi 7.31-32, purport)

Certainly, adopting the neo-*smārtas* Taliban-like policies would be a disaster for the spreading of Krishna consciousness.

Could It Be Just Plain Envy?

In *Caitanya-caritamṛta*, Srila Prabhupada makes a potentially puzzling and seriously unnerving statement:

"A mundane person in the dress of a Vaiṣṇava should not be respected but rejected. This is enjoined in the *śāstra* (*upekṣā*). The word *upekṣā* means neglect. One should neglect an envious person. A preacher's duty is to love the Supreme Personality of Godhead, make friendships with Vaiṣṇavas, show mercy to the innocent and reject or neglect those who are envious or jealous. There are many jealous people in the

dress of Vaiṣṇavas in this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, and they should be completely neglected." (Cc Madhya, 1.218, purport)



"There are many jealous people in the dress of Vaiṣṇavas in this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement." Wow. Others may also deserve the "jealous" label (including myself), but neo-*smārtas* perfectly fit Srila Prabhupada's enigmatic description. For instance, we see Vaisnavis who, through decades of loyal service and diligent study of scriptures, have fully qualified themselves as spiritual teachers. But **"A jealous person in the dress of a Vaiṣṇava is not at all happy to see the success of another Vaiṣṇava in receiving the Lord's mercy."** (Cc Madhya, 1.220, purport) Sincere seekers wish to be initiated by such Vaisnavis, but the jealous neo-*smārtas* would do anything to prevent that from happening.

Are the Rights the Same or Not?

Devotees can get confused; sometimes Srila Prabhupada appears as being against equal rights: **"The women are claiming equal rights. So stop giving birth to a child. Then equal rights."** (Morning Walk, Perth, 8 May 1975)

At other times he speaks of equal rights on the spiritual platform: **"There is no restriction for going back to home, back to Godhead, for anyone, and what to speak of man, woman—anyone . . . For God there is no discrimination. Women, men have equal rights to become godly and back to home, back to Godhead."** (Lecture on SB 5.5.2, Johannesburg, 22 Jan 1975)

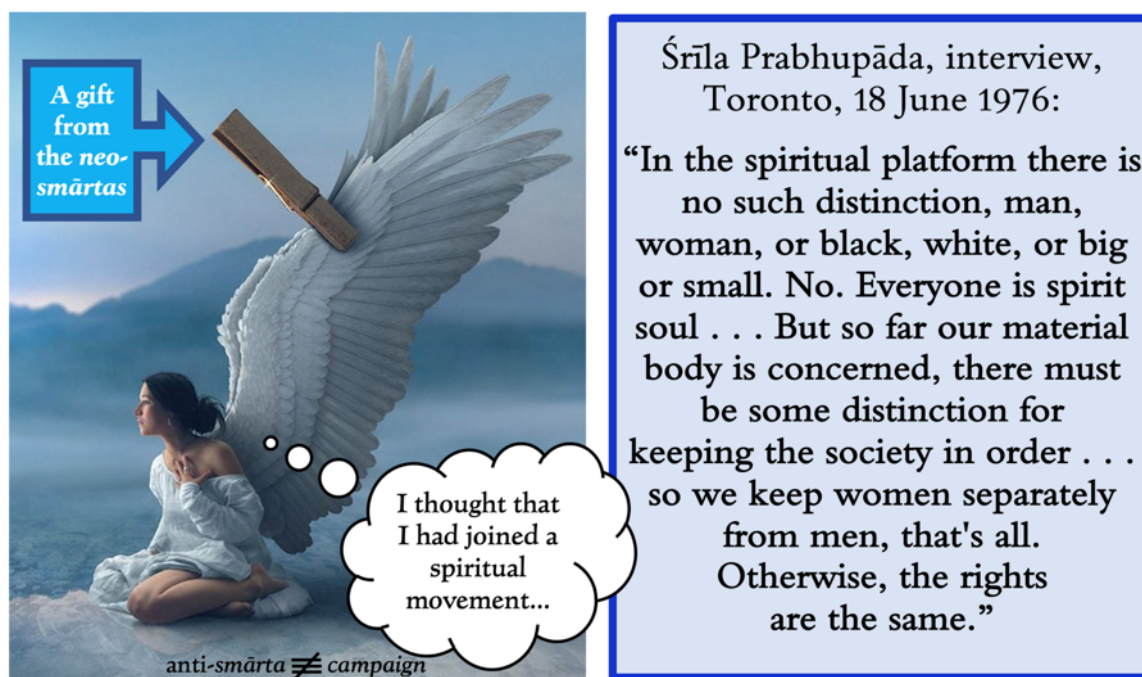
The next year, during an interview, Srila Prabhupada makes the point that in his Society men and women have equal rights: **"Because superficially, bodily, there is some distinction, so we keep women separately from men, that's all. Otherwise, the rights are the same."** (Interview, Toronto, 18 June 1976)

The apparent conundrum is easy to solve; Srila Prabhupada addresses different anthropological levels, making different statements pertinent to each level. It's like saying "ABC" - are we talking about the first three letters of the alphabet? Are we indicating, in geometry, the three sides of a triangle? Or are we referring to the *American Broadcasting Company*? On an anatomical level, the genders are obviously different: **"If you have equal right, then let your husband become**

pregnant." (Morning Walk, Vrindavana, 10 Dec 1975) The *pregnancy-factor* certainly dictates, among other things, differences in the physiological, socio-economic, and legal aspects of life.

On the spiritual level, not only **"the rights are the same"**; the missionary duties are also the same: **"Now I see that in our society the girls are more intelligent than the boys . . . these siddhantic conclusions are being mentioned in all my books, and the boys and girls in our Krsna Society should now give more attention for studying the books very attentively . . . I hope in Washington center you will ask all the boys and girls to follow this method, because henceforward we will have to face many scholars and philosophers."** (Letter to Krishna Devi, 17 Feb 1970)

Do I need to elaborate? Srila Prabhupada wanted his "girls" to face **"scholars and philosophers,"** not just cook chapatis and sweep the floor. The neo-*smārtas* (poor things) keep hammering on the gross physical platform because that's where they are stuck. Distant from the mood and mission of the Founder-*Ācārya*, the neo-*smārtas*' favorite hobby - practically their *raison d'être* - is clipping the wings of Vaisnavis.



Sometimes it appears as if the neo-*smārtas*' goal of life and highest aspiration was preventing women from fulfilling Srila Prabhupada's mandate: **"This Krishna Consciousness is the most urgent need of the whole human society, and we need so many preachers, both boys and girls, to spread this message throughout the world."** (Letter to Andrea Temple, 26 Feb 1968)

Given a binary choice, neo-*smārtas* would rather engage women in ironing their underwear than in saving souls. Marvelous potentialities are closed to the neo-*smārtas* (and to those who take them seriously).

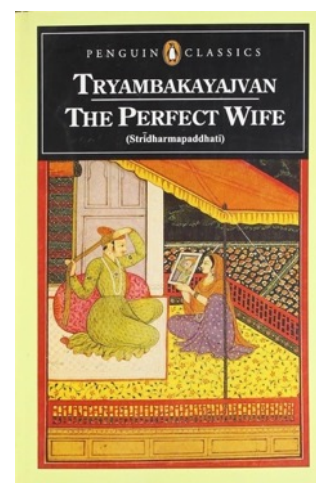
“Strī-dharma-paddhati” - a Book Neo-*smārtas* Would Love

"By chance" I discovered a 300-year-old book. I was hesitating to specify the title and the author, for fear that neo-*smārtas* may adopt this strange text as one of their primary references. I was concerned that, emboldened by this book, they would make their crusade against sanity in husband-wife relationship even more silly. Finally, I decided to openly share about the book so that the saner section of ISKCON can see it as a historical antecedent, a precursor of the weird phenomena we witness today.

The book is entitled *Strī-dharma-paddhati* - a manual on the *dharma* of women - and the author is a Tryambakayajvan, a court *pandit* in the 18th century Thanjavur Maratha kingdom of present-day Tamil Nadu, India.¹² The quoted sections are from the Wikipedia [article](#). The book is basically a list of dos and don'ts for women, especially married ones. Here are some examples:

"a woman . . . should obey his [the husband's] commands even if they are in opposition to other religious duties." In other words, she should abandon her discrimination of what is *dharma* and what is *adharmā*, becoming like an automaton in the hands of the (possibly *adharmic*) husband. Women, although mere puppets of their spouses, may still benefit from this great book. The author, "suggests that women have not fallen too low, and therefore, capable of receiving instructions specified in his book." In other words, women may have just enough brain to follow the writer's recommendations.

Let's consider that the men who followed this book have probably reincarnated a few times, but it's possible that they maintained much of their attitude intact. We see similar ideas being hyped today by some of the neo-*smārtas*. They must have gotten those ideas somewhere, presumably in a previous existence.



¹² Link to the Wikipedia [article](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Str%C4%AB-dharma-paddhati): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Str%C4%AB-dharma-paddhati>

Another edifying gem: "Women are not expected to visit friends or study." So, they should basically live under house-arrest, and they are also prohibited from intellectual development. Which makes sense: who knows what strange ideas women would get if they started reading books! The neo-*smārtas* are right in preaching that women should be kept illiterate; an ounce of prevention...

"Regarding women's property rights . . . [the author] attempts to reconcile various contradictory authorities. For example, he lists the six types of property that a woman can own (e.g.: given to her by her relatives), but states that a married woman needs her husband's permission to exercise her property rights." This, I confess, sounds reasonable; who knows what she could order from Amazon without her husband's supervision?

The author "does not make any provisions for a woman to rest, and lists day-time sleep among the things that corrupt women (and therefore should be avoided)." So, forget about that dissolute afternoon nap, you sluggish womenfolk!

And there are more restrictions: "a woman should not answer back if her husband scolds her, or show anger and resentment if her husband beats her." Resistance of any kind would be deplorable and offensive. If anything, the wife should think that she should have been beaten more, not less. If she has some aggressivity left in her (even after all the benevolent, therapeutic beatings), she can express it in bed: "The only exception is love-making, during which it is acceptable for a woman to strike her husband, scratch him, show anger towards him, or use harsh words as an

Śrīla Prabhupāda, lecture on SB 2.1.2-5, Montreal, 23 Oct 1968:
"Na strī svāntryam arhati. Manu-saṁhitā, that 'Strī'—strī means woman— 'should not be allowed independence' . . . No independence means they are well protected. No independence does not mean that he has no independence to act. No. She has got. But under the protection. Just like there are some nation still now, protectorate. America is protecting. America is a big nation; and protecting another small nation. That does not mean they have no independence. They are also independent."

expression of her passion." Hmm... OK, clear enough... but the rest of the day she should just keep quiet!

As far as general restrictions: "The following six things cause women (and Shudras) to fall: recitation of sacred texts, ritual austerities (*tapas*), pilgrimage, renunciation (*pravrajya*), chanting of mantras, and worship of deities."

So, strictly no reading of Srila Prabhupada's books (or any other "sacred texts"); no devotional austerities; no traveling to Mayapur,

Vrindavana, or Puri; no renunciation (?), and no chanting of *japa*. Women! Forget about chanting sixteen rounds; you should not chant *any* rounds. And no "worship of deities." (In ISKCON we often suffer from shortage of *pujaris*; otherwise, we should certainly adopt this judicious injunction.)

But worship is not completely forbidden; in fact the *proper* worship is warmly recommended: "a wife should worship only three deities: her husband, and the two sister goddesses - Shri (Lakshmi) and Jyestha (Alakshmi)." Something is better than nothing. Women, forget about worshiping Gaura-Nitai and Radha-Krishna in this lifetime, but if you worship your husband with unalloyed devotion, you will get the blessings of all the neo-*smārtas*!

The ideas in this book - certainly not a product of Caitanya-vaisnavism - would be today considered atrocious and criminal in most countries (perhaps with the exclusion of Talibanic Afghanistan). Nonetheless, our ISKCON neo-*smārtas* are essentially promoting the same mood today. If they had a free hand, who knows what else they would impose.

We are compelled to think that the main motivation of the neo-*smārtas* is not establishing a pure form of *varṇāśrama* but indulging their psychological maladjustments (especially in connection with women), their sexual frustrations, and their emotional and intellectual inadequacies. The epistemic claim of the book resembles what the neo-*smārtas* boast, that their conjectures have full scriptural corroboration: "The author concludes by stating that he has included content from various texts (shruti, *smṛti*, and puranas) in his work only after thorough examination." After such "thorough examination" the author concludes that "it is acceptable for a husband to sell his wife." But the sale, I presume, shouldn't be below the market rate, or it would be highly inappropriate (financially, not morally).

You may think: "Who is this man?! How can he write such stuff?!" Well, you might be surprised, but it turns out that he is apparently a devotee; in fact, in the book "he dedicates his work to Krishna." This devotee died in 1750. I wouldn't be surprised if, after four or five rounds of reincarnation, he is still obsessively and pathologically ranting about *strī-dharma*, this time with a high rank among the neo-*smārtas*.

A Beloved Speculation: Women Have No *Varṇa*

This section still belongs to the broad category of "War on Women" discussed above, but the neo-*smārtas* have insisted on this fantasy so much that I decided to make it into a primary topic.¹³

No *Varṇa*, Just Like Cows



Cows are simply animals; don't have *varṇas*, social identifiers within *varṇāśrama*. A cow may belong to the king - a *ksatriya* - and you may refer to her (or to 'it?') as 'the cow of the king.' Then one day the king may donate that cow to a *brāhmaṇa*. Now you can call her 'the cow of the *brāhmaṇa*.' Later the *brāhmaṇa* may sell the cow to a farmer, and she now becomes 'the farmer's cow'; but the cow was never a *ksatriya*, a *brāhmaṇa* or a *vaiśya*. Similarly (and the following are real quotes from a neo-*smārta* activist): "A woman doesn't have a *varṇa* on her own. She gets the *varṇa* of her protector."

So, the woman floats *varṇlessly* from a man to another, merging into the *varṇa* of "her protector." (For now, let's not explore the status of unmarried women) The same author of the above quote elaborates: "Women do not have a *varṇa* of their own (by birth or by quality), but they get the *varṇa* of their protector (father or husband)." Besides the flagrant lack of logic (if women take the *varṇa* of their fathers it means that they have a *varṇa* by birth - duh), the sentence also flies in the face of *Bhagavad-gīta* 4.13, in which Lord Krishna "forgets" to mention fathers or husbands but only speaks of *guṇa* and *karma*:

*cātur-varṇyaṁ mayā sṛṣṭaṁ
guṇa-karma-vibhāśaḥ*

"According to the three modes of material nature and the work associated with them, the four divisions of human society are created by Me."

¹³ I gratefully acknowledge Urmila Prabhu's research and paper about women and their *varṇa*.

Another social media commentator apparently found the notion of *varṇa*-less women indefensible and chimed in: "the woman gets the *varṇa* of the father, she was never without a *varṇa*." This appears as progress, but we are still in the "birth space" (a favorite neo-*smārta* spot) and still contradicting the Gita verse, which doesn't mention "birth" (*janma*) as the defining ingredient of *varṇa*, but only "*guṇa-karma*" - qualities and work.



What to do? This seems like an unresolvable conundrum... How to appreciate the words of God in the *Gīta* as authoritative but simultaneously corroborate the neo-*smārta* theory that women have no *varṇa*? It seems irreconcilable... But - wait a minute! - I might have found the solution, a long-term one: the neo-*smārtas* should tell Lord Krishna that the next time He speaks the *Bhagavad-gīta* He should be more careful and add a new verse (perhaps a 4.13-bis), a verse specifically dealing with women. It should not mention *guṇa* and *karma* but only fathers and husbands. The verse would sound something like this:

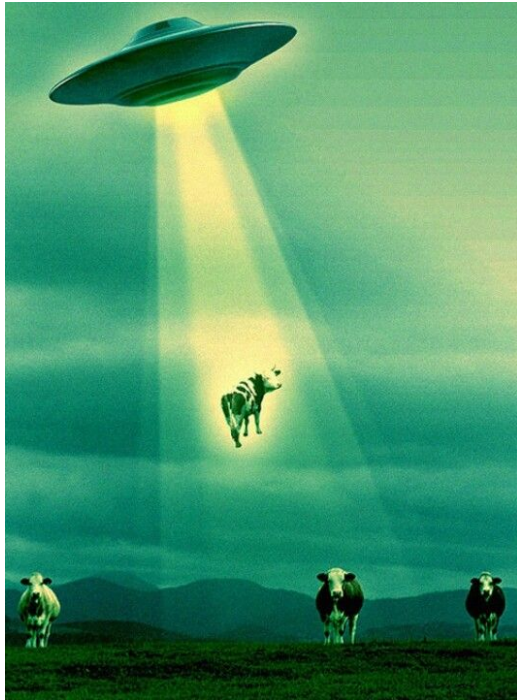
strī-varṇyaṁ mayā sṛṣṭaṁ
pitā-pati-vibhāgaśaḥ

"According to the *varṇa* of the father or the husband, the divisions of women are created by Me." Then the problem will be solved and the neo-*smārtas* will (finally!) have some *śāstric* evidence to back up their theory.

Bovine Transferal Episodes

Another gentleman on social media tried his hand at *varṇāśrama* commentary (the comments in square brackets are mine): "A woman belongs to the Varna of her father [again the same "by birth," caste-centered drivel...], husband and when she becomes old, she remains under the Varna of her elderly sons which is the same as her husband [again the same "by birth" rubbish, as if sons were automatically the same *varṇa* of their fathers...]. That is what it means, when she is transferred from one man to the next."

Lady readers: I am curious: how was your experience in getting "transferred" from one man to another? Was it smooth, or when you got "transferred from one man to the next" you felt some sort of "social jet-lag"? Were you "transferred" efficiently - as a punctual Amazon parcel delivery - or was the transferal delayed or bumpy?



Were you, the product, damaged in any way in the handling? If for a phase of your life you had no immediate protector, did you feel some sort of void or emptiness... some sort of "*varṇa*-vacuum" - similar to what astronauts experience in the absence of gravity? Please tell me, I have a thing for sociology, and I am intrigued to learn how you were "transferred from one man to the next" - an image that reminds me of rugby players passing the ball sideways among themselves.

Perhaps during the time you were unprotected you felt as incorporeally hovering in space, like a disembodied ghost? Or perhaps you felt afflicted by the unbearable weight of the lower modes, which only a man could help lift from your tender shoulders? Please share about your transference experiences with me.

The same commentator, now in an almost lyrical, metaphorical mood, added: "women . . . are regarded as a mother, just as cow is regarded as a mother." Well, ladies, at least you made it to mammalian status. It could have been worse... The poet continues: "women are worshiped as mother and shakti energy, just as a cow is worshiped as a mother and giver of wealth (milk)." Ladies, if you are lucky, you might even get a little worship at the next *go-puja*!

The gentleman was on a bovine-*bhāva* roll: "Women should be kept protected just as cows are protected as they are regarded as wealth." So, cheer up ladies! Men such as this will certainly provide you a comfortable barn, a very nice goshala in which you will be "kept protected" and "regarded as wealth" - valuable chattel - even if you don't produce as much milk as a cow! (That's generous.) You might not have experienced much protection as women - you might have felt discriminated, sidelined, underestimated, and mistreated - but as cows you may feel more welcome and appreciated!



After all, even the worst neo-*smārta* will at least pay lip service to cow protection. I think it's a fair deal for someone like you, with no *varṇa*... Come on ladies, let's not be too demanding; let's hear from all of you an enthusiastic "MOOOOO!"

A Vaisnavi from America commented: "Thank you for a lightening comedy in response to and against a heavily de-personalizing mentality. Factually I'm a soul in a female human body, a person. For it to be considered that my personality is or can be entirely altered by being in the association of the main male person in my life implies that I don't have a steady, innate personality, that my personality can basically be entirely molded by another person. Kind of like a blank slate that can be built upon. It's an interesting perspective. It doesn't entirely align with my experience of myself and others in female human bodies. In fact, it doesn't align with my experience of animals, either. Ask anyone who has cared for cows, each cow has their own unique personality and nature. Any sentient empathically-connected person can perceive personality differences in other sentient beings, and can perceive how that nature doesn't change entirely based on any externals or relationships."

Women: Colorless Mirrors?

When I publicly stressed that women do have *varṇas*, some devotees influenced by neo-*smārta* propaganda became disturbed, as expected. Demoting and denigrating Vaisnavis seems to be the neo-*smārtas'* official hobby and favorite pastime. A subset of their heterodoxy is trying to convince the world - starting with ISKCON - that women have no *varṇa*, or that they acquire a *varṇa* only in connection with a man.

No man, no *varṇa*.

This is patently absurd because '*varṇa*' simply indicates the social designation determined by the psycho-physical nature and the modes of work acquired in touch with the *guṇas*. All individual members of *varṇāśrama* - men or women - carry some mixture of *guṇas*, which situates them into one of the four broad categories: *brāhmaṇa*, *ksatriya*, *vaiśya* and *sūdras* (that's why those four words have their feminine form in Sanskrit!) As the influence of the *guṇas* is flexible, elastic, one's *varṇa* can also change. Śrīla Prabhupada explains it in this way: "*catur varṇyam... catur* means 'four,' and *varṇa* means 'Division of society.' Just like *varṇa* means color. As there are division of color—red, blue, and yellow—similarly human being, human society should be divided according to the quality. The quality is also called color. *Catur varṇyam mayā sṛṣṭam guṇa-karma-vibhāgaśaḥ* (Bg 4.13). So there are three qualities in this material world. Three qualities, or three colors: red, blue and yellow." (Lecture on Bg 4.13, New York, 8 April 1973)

Women: Colorless Mirrors?



To say that women have no *varṇa* is like saying that women are... colorless - which is untenable. It's also similarly indefensible and unscientific to say that women automatically and unfailingly acquire the "color" of the father or the husband - as if women were merely walking mirrors, simply reflecting the color of the men in the house.

The reader may wonder: "But why do we need to spend so much time discussing the *varṇa* status of women?" My answer: "Because women comprise half of humanity and because the rest of humanity will deal with them. And because today - thanks to

the neo-*smārtas* - there is a lot of perplexity and disorientation being spread around, even about what a woman *is*. This creates confusion and violence, severely affecting ISKCON's capacity to care for its members and dismantling its reputation as a spiritual movement.

Women As Simply Men's Shadows

In his sustained attempt at depersonalizing and objectifying women, a neo-*smārta* promoter publicly wrote that if a guru falls down, automatically the wife (*patnī*) also falls down. This appears as an extension or application of the fabricated theory that women have no *varṇa*, so that when a man - in this case a guru - faces spiritual difficulties, inevitably the wife will face difficulties as well. These are his words: "Because the guru fell down the guru *patnī* also falls down with him." What?!... Why?!... How?!...

Apparently unaware of the preposterousness of the statement, he insisted: "The wife as a disciple follows the husband." First of all, even taking literally that the wife is the disciple of the husband (many times it the opposite, the wife is more advanced than the husband), nowhere in *śāstra* it says that if the guru falls down, also the disciple inevitably falls down.

In their dark, misogynistic fantasies, neo-*smārtas* don't see Vaisnavis as persons, but as mere shadows of their husbands (if they are not married, perhaps they even lose the "shadow" status...). A shadow has no free-will or autonomy, it simply follows the object of which is a shadow. But Vaisnavis - and all women - are individual spirit



souls. If they are initiated and their husbands fall down that doesn't have to affect the wives' spiritual status. She can just maintain her vows and her practice. (Do I really need to explain this to adults?)

Such statements offer a glimpse of the murky universe of the neo-*smārtas*. When you start an equation with a wrong step, the whole calculation goes off. When one starts with the absurd assumption that the wife is a mere shadow of her husband, with

no *varṇa* and no separate freewill, the beliefs get weirder and weirder, as a misconception must be supported by another conjecture, which must be backed by another speculation... till the sociology of the *sampradāya* is demolished. Imagine the monstrous ISKCON these people would create if they were not stopped.

If Women Have No *Varṇa*, Why Vedic Astrology Evaluates It?

Jyotisha, astrology, is a *vedāṅga*, one of the six "limbs" for practical application of the Vedic revelation. Although belonging to the *aparā vidyā* ("the inferior system of material knowledge" - Cc Madhya, 19.17, purport), Srila Prabhupada recommends using astrology for matters such as identifying the *varṇa* of prospective spouses:

"[T]he custom in Vedic society is to examine the horoscopes of a girl and boy being considered for marriage to see whether their combination is suitable. Vedic astrology reveals whether one has been born in the *vipra-varṇa*, *kṣatriya-varṇa*, *vaiśya-varṇa* or *śūdra-varṇa*, according to the three qualities of material nature. This must be examined because a marriage between a boy of the *vipra-varṇa* and a girl of the *śūdra-varṇa* is incompatible; married life would be miserable for both husband and wife. Consequently a boy should marry a girl of the same category." (SB 6.2.26, purport)

Notice that in this quote the word *varṇa* is repeated six times, with no neo-*smārta* phantasmagoria added. Srila Prabhupada clearly says, "a boy should marry a girl of the same category." He does not say, "the girl will miraculously assume the category of the boy she marries, supernaturally shedding her personal *guṇa* and *karma* during the wedding ceremony." But, in open contradiction with what Srila Prabhupada explains above, someone publicly declared: "I said woman have no *varṇa* on their

own, they carry the *varṇa* of their protector. I have said this a number of times: before marriage they get the *varṇa* of their father; after marriage they don't carry that *varṇa* along with them into the marriage."

But why astrology should calculate the bride's *varṇa* if she was just "merging" into her husband's *varṇa*? The whole theory doesn't make any sense. It only exposes the depersonalizing and dehumanizing neo-*smārta* plot against women. *Jyotisha* wouldn't have to worry about *varṇa* compatibility if women automatically took the *varṇa* of "their protectors." Again, it's a basic misunderstanding of *varṇa* - which is not simply an external social label but a psychophysical designator indicating the mentality and nature of a person (which obviously doesn't magically change by a wedding rite). I don't think I should belabor the point, because it should be obvious to whoever has even a passing familiarity with Vedic astrology.



The Sun & the Moon



If we wished to salvage some partial truth from the idea that the wife takes on the *varṇa* of the husband, we could look at another aspect of astrology/psychology. Feminine nature is more flexible than the masculine one. The moon represents the feminine, and the moon is waxing and waning; the sun represents the masculine, and the sun is fixed, always appearing in the same shape (Many men have strong moon qualities and, astrologically, they are more *female* than *male*; but that's for some other day). It's therefore appropriate (*anuloma*) that the husband be of the same or higher *varṇa*, so that the woman, more adaptable in nature, can elevate herself by following him. A woman of a higher *varṇa* (nobler mentality, cleaner aspirations, more refined *guṇa-karma*, etc.) will degrade herself by serving a lower man (*pratiloma*).

The whole *varṇāśrama* scheme is for elevation of the individuals; and the *grihastha-śrama* is at the core of the whole system, the situation in which most people will spend the most time. The marriage guidelines are (originally) meant to facilitate

that elevation: “The life of a human being is a chance to prepare oneself to go back to Godhead . . . Thus in the system of *varṇāśrama-dharma* every man and woman is trained for this purpose.” (SB 1.19.4, purport)

The training may take different forms for men and women. The woman is advised to take a psychologically subordinate position to the (qualified, first-class) husband. In traditional settings she is often significantly younger, which helps engender that deference. She has also not lived in the *gurukula*, which her twice-born husband did. In those times was naturally for the wife to see her husband as her leader, as her superior, as her *guru-pati*. The proper *anuloma* and *pratiloma* considerations involve such dynamics; but you can't force an educated, earning, urban woman in her twenties or early thirties, to act as a pubescent and illiterate village girl.

The problem is that neo-*smārtas* don't grasp *varṇāśrama* holistically or maturely, but in a narrow-minded and rigidly literalistic way. Often the situation is exacerbated by the fact that their mood is not that of a benevolent protector, but of an insecure and frustrated man-child. Therefore, they express their "cultural values" in a puerile, confrontational manner ("down with the less-intelligent women!")

One can process the idea that a “woman takes the *varṇa* of the husband” in *sattva*, *rajas* or *tamas*. In *sattva* (goodness), the approach is based on knowledge of the nature (conditioning and temperament) of men and women, with the intention of creating conducive circumstances for the happiness and edification of both. The relationship should be ideally imbued with the Vaisnava mood of mutual respect and reciprocal service, seeing each other as eternal servants of Krishna.

In *rajas* (passion), the mood is strongly affected by hierarchical attitudes and the body-as-the-self mindset. In *tamas* (ignorance), the whole thing is blind to deeper considerations, hostage to base instincts and archaic superstitions. The tamasic conception would be risible if it weren't tragic.

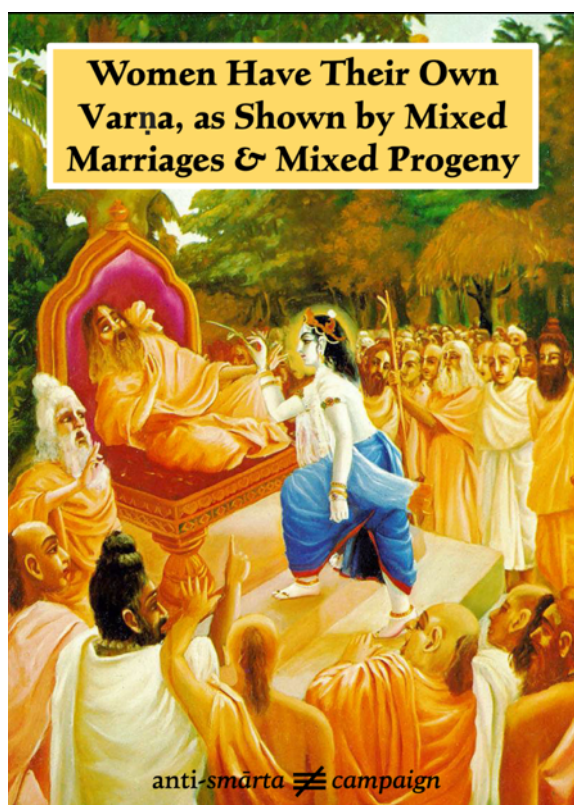
Mixed Marriages & Mixed Progeny Show that Women Have Their Own *Varṇa*

There are two major problems with the idea that the woman automatically takes the *varṇa* of the father: 1. The notion is birth-dependent and therefore against the "*guṇa-karma*" model of Sri Krishna. 2. *Śāstra* explain that the *varṇa* of a child doesn't depend only on the *varṇa* of the father, but on the *varṇas* of both parents (just like Vidura, son of Vyasadeva and a *sūdrani*, was considered a *sūdra*, not a *brāhmaṇa*).

As far taking the *varṇa* of the husband: Srila Prabhupada clearly explains that women bring their own *varṇa* into the marriage - they don't simply "amalgamate" into the *varṇa* of the husband. Human beings have their own acquired psychophysical tendencies that don't mystically and immediately transform by a mere *vivaha-yajna*, a wedding ritual. Srila Prabhupada clearly explains that it's the combination of the *varṇas* of the parents that defined the social status of their children:

"According to the Vedic concept, there are two kinds of mixed family heritage. They are called *anuloma* and *pratiloma*. When a male is united with a female of a lower caste, the offspring is called *anuloma*; but when a male unites with a woman of a higher caste, the offspring is called *pratiloma*." (*Krishna Book*, Chapter 77) In the same chapter, Srila Prabhupada applies this concept to Romaharsana Suta - the father of Suta Goswami: "Romaharṣaṇa Sūta had been given the position of a *brāhmaṇa*, but he had not been born in the family of a *brāhmaṇa*; he had been born in a *pratiloma* family . . . Romaharṣaṇa Sūta belonged to the *pratiloma* family because his father was a *kṣatriya* and his mother a *brāhmaṇa*."

Romaharsana's *brāhmaṇa* mother didn't simply "fuse" into her husband's *kṣatriya* *varṇa*; her brahminical status didn't just... dissolve because of marrying a *ksatriya*. Srila Prabhupada also explains that *varṇas* are malleable, dependent on the level of "realization" of the individual, not simply on the status of the parents:



"Because Romaharṣaṇa's transcendental realization was not perfect, Lord Balarāma remembered his *pratiloma* heritage. The idea is that any man can be given the chance to become a *brāhmaṇa*, but if he improperly uses the position of a *brāhmaṇa* without actual realization, then his elevation to the brahminical position is not valid." (*Krishna Book*, Chapter 77) Romaharṣaṇa failed to fully upgrade culturally and Lord Balarama detected Romaharṣaṇa Sūta's arrogance, which gave away Romaharsana's mixed genealogy (technically he was a *sūta*, as indicated by his name). Lord Balarama then killed him for his impudence. (SB 10.78.22-28)

Saying that a woman simply blends with the husband's *varṇa* is therefore unscientific and therefore rejected in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, the highest *śāstric* reference for Gaudiya-vaisnavas.

Srila Prabhupada elaborates, in the Seventh Canto: "The four principal divisions of society—*brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya* and *śūdra*—have been defined, and now there is a description of the *antyaja*, the mixed classes. Among the mixed classes, there are two divisions—*pratilomaja* and *anulomaja*. If a woman of a high caste marries a man of a lower caste, their union is called *pratiloma*. If a woman of a low caste, however, marries a man of a higher caste, their union is called *anuloma*. The members of such dynasties have their traditional duties as barbers, washermen and so on." (SB 7.11.30, purport)

Could it be clearer than this? "If a woman of a high caste... If a woman of a low caste..." *Caste*, of course, being the English rendering of *varṇa*. Srila Prabhupada also writes: "[I]t is learned from the notes of Śrīpāda Madhvācārya that Vasudeva and Nanda Mahārāja were stepbrothers. Vasudeva's father, Śūrasena, married a *vaiśya* girl, and from her Nanda Mahārāja was born. Later, Nanda Mahārāja himself married a *vaiśya* girl, Yaśodā. Therefore his family is celebrated as a *vaiśya* family." (SB 10.5.20, purport)

Saying that women have no *varṇa* on their own is absurd. Such idea appears as born from the *pratiloma* union between a superficial *śāstric* understanding with pathological misogyny.

On a Social Level, the Wife Takes the *Varṇa* of the Husband - and Vice-versa

It works both ways. The world recently witnessed the coronation of King Charles III and of his wife, Queen Camilla. Camilla Parker Bowles was a commoner, devoid of royal titles, when, in 2005, she married the then Prince Charles. At that time, she became Duchess of Cornwall. Now, as the wife of Charles III, she is Queen of the United Kingdom and of fourteen other Commonwealth realms. So, yes, the wife takes the "*varṇa*" or joins the social status of the husband. But the inverse is also true: ordinary men who marry into royalty acquire the "*aristocratic varṇa*" of their wives.





In 2010, for instance, Victoria, Crown Princess of Sweden, married her personal trainer, Daniel Westling, who thus became prince and duke. The member of the couple - man or woman - who is socially lesser, gets upgraded to a status similar to the one of the higher-ranking spouses. This works also outside of royal environments and aristocratic bloodlines. A man of modest wealth, for example, marries a super-rich woman and he also becomes rich and starts moving in moneyed circles (same for a woman of limited means who marries a very wealthy man).

The same dynamic in a different sphere: Giorgia Meloni became Prime Minister of Italy after winning the 2022 elections. Her companion, Andrea Gianbruno, a journalist, is not a member of parliament or a politician, but because of his relationship with her, he gets to rub elbows with heads of state and other world leaders. So, when you hear the neo-*smārtas* restating for the umpteenth time the "the wife takes the *varṇa* of the husband," please remember that (purely on the social platform) the idea is acceptable, but that it also works the other way around.

Why Is This So Important for Neo-*smārtas*?

I expect that by now the average reader would be seriously bored by the topic. By this time a normal person would have concluded something like, "OK, I get it, women are human beings with their own *guṇa* and *karma* - qualities, personal characteristics, inclinations for certain kinds of activities, etc. - and accordingly fit in one of the four *varṇas*. All the statements by Srila Prabhupada and *śāstra* about mixed marriages and mixed progenies are more than enough evidence for that. Also, astrology wouldn't and couldn't calculate women's *varṇa* if they had none."

Classification by birth might have been applicable, to some extent, in a rigid but diligent caste system in which twice-born people performed all the *saṁskāras*, starting with *garbhādhāna* (the rite of conception), but the system doesn't apply today: "There is no more *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*. All *śūdras*." Srila Prabhupada says, "We have to accept. Because no Vedic culture, no *garbhādhāna saṁskāra*. They are born like cats and dogs. So where is this division? There cannot be. Therefore, accept them as *śūdra*." (Lecture on Bg 1.40, London, 28 July 1973) But *śūdra* is also a *varṇa*; and within this oceanic spread of *śūdras* we can still identify the *varṇic*

archetypes of intellectuals and priests, rulers and administrators, wealth producers, and skilled workers. And this applies to both men and women.



But let's take a minute to reflect: why is it so important for neo-*smārtas* to insist that women have no *varṇa*, despite all evidence? The fundamental intention seems to simply depersonalize women, to exorcise their individuality and power. Neo-*smārtas* can see, they can directly observe with their own eyes, very intelligent women professors, judges, and writers; influential women politicians and heads of state; rich businesswomen and lady entrepreneurs; skilled women artists, artisans, and computer programmers - and all this regardless of who their fathers or husbands are. Why neo-*smārtas* deny their own *direct perception* and instead cling to a theory that's neither visible in this world nor supported by scripture? I must conclude that this sexist

"women-as-*varṇa*-chameleons" doctrine is born out of a great sense of insecurity. It's the psychological need of the underdeveloped male to feel superior to females. No matter what. It sounds like a pathological version of the primitive "Me Tarzan, you Jane" approach. While the Supreme Male, Krishna, is comfortable with being controlled by the love of His female companions, the wimpish neo-*smārta* males are terrified at the thought that women could have power, character, and personality autonomously from their meager control.

Men need to realize that due to technological progress and other historical processes (such as increased girl education), the man's function as provider and protector contingent on body mass and muscular prowess it's outdated, surpassed for good. Of course, male body mass and muscular prowess are still helpful for beating and killing women, but not anymore for determining socio-economic advantage.

A "Theory" for a Bygone Era

After reading some of the public posts from various neo-*smārtas* on women and *varṇa*, someone from Europe wrote: "In the real world women have their own

abilities, work and succeed. I think you all live in some backwards fairy tale realm to suit your own madness." I believe that's a blunt but accurate description of the neo-*smārta* dimension, the surreal space in which perception of reality is blurred (or lost) and pseudo-Vedic distortions dominate the conversation.

Another neo-*smārta* tried to demonstrate that women have no *varṇa* by sharing a quote, which he apparently took it as the Holy Grail of references. Although unconvincing and irrelevant, this (mis)quote is a classic in the neo-*smārta* repertoire. It's an excerpt from a Srila Prabhupada's lecture on SB 1.3.17, given in Los Angeles, on 22 Sept 1972:

"Woman, they are generally equipped with the qualities of passion and ignorance. And man also may be, but man can be elevated to the platform of goodness. Woman cannot be. Woman cannot be. Therefore if the husband is nice and the woman follows—woman becomes faithful and chaste to the husband—then their both life becomes successful. There are three qualities of nature: *sattva, raja, tama*. So *rajas-tama*, generally, that is the quality of woman. And man can become to the platform of goodness. Therefore initiation, brahminical symbolic representation, is given to the man, not to the woman. This is the theory."

The last sentence ("This is the theory") it's the key to understand that Srila Prabhupada wasn't talking about an universal principle but just a "theory" previously



implemented in the caste system. In other words, as often happens, he was sharing a social *description* and not a *prescription*. In the quote Srila Prabhupada says, **"initiation, brahminical symbolic representation, is given to the man, not to the woman."** But Srila Prabhupada gave hundreds of brahminical initiations to women! And he clearly specified that these women were *dvijas*, twice-born - even those with no husband.

Srila Prabhupada did speak about many other processes and customs meant for different time periods, but in ISKCON we must carry out what he personally instructed and implemented. That a woman could become *brāhmaṇa* only by marrying a *brāhmaṇa* was neither his instruction nor his personal example.

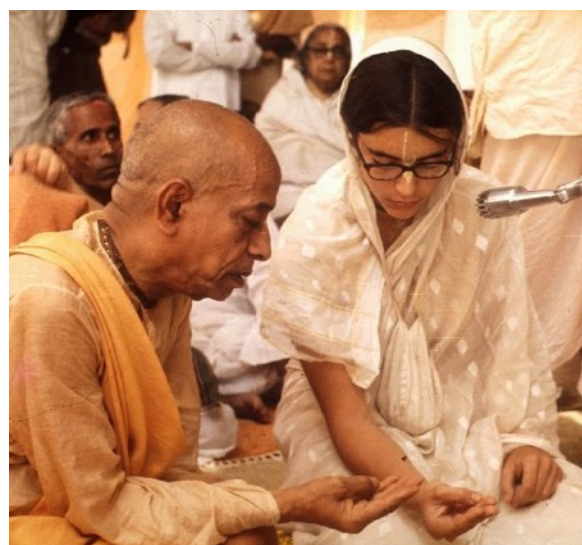
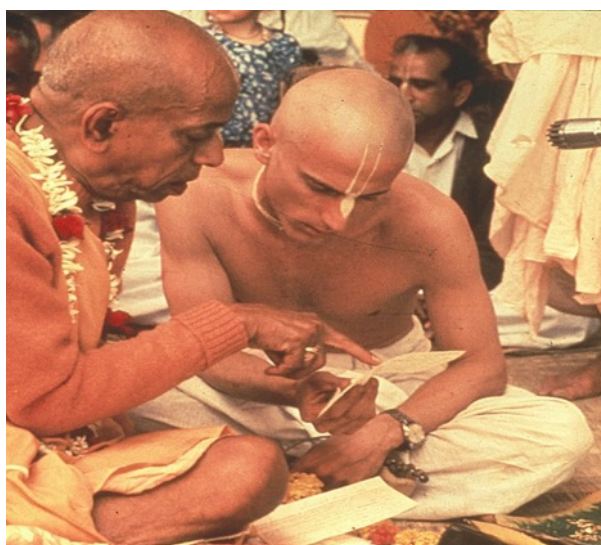
Neo-*smārtas* make a big fuss about another part of the quote, about women being **"generally equipped with the qualities of passion and ignorance."** But Srila Prabhupada clearly says **"generally"**; he even says it a second time: **"*rajas-tama*, generally, that is the quality of woman."** For readers who may not be too fluent in

English, let me elaborate: "generally" means "in most cases; usually" and "usually" means "customarily, ordinarily." So, what percentage do you want "generally" to indicate? 60%? 75%? 90%? I want to be generous with the neo-*smārtas*: let's take "**generally**" as meaning 99% percent. Let's say, for argument's sake, that 99% of women are "**equipped with the qualities of passion and ignorance.**" That leaves 40-million women who are in *sattva-guna* - the population of an average country. That's a huge army of potential *brāhmaṇas*. But let's not forget that all the other 3,960,000,000 women can also become purified from the lower modes by practicing *bhakti-yoga*. By devotional service potentially *all of them* can go to Krishna in this very lifetime (what to speak of becoming *brāhmaṇas*).

Can Women Become *Brāhmaṇas*?

(Spoiler alert: yes, they can, and they should.) Frankly, I am a little embarrassed to explain this elementary stuff to adults, but neo-*smārtas* have poisoned the pond to such an extent that doubts and misapprehensions now exist even about such basic concepts. Since neo-*smārtas* often fail to acknowledge that women have their own *varṇa*, imagine their horror when they hear that women can autonomously become *brāhmaṇas*, the highest *varṇa*! For some of them this idea is emotionally indigestible.

All Gaudiya-vaisnavas already know the following: "One who has become a devotee of the Lord is also a *brāhmaṇa*. The formula is *brahma jānātīti brāhmaṇaḥ*. A *brāhmaṇa* is one who has understood Brahman, and a Vaiṣṇava is one who has understood the Personality of Godhead." (SB 3.16.4, purport)



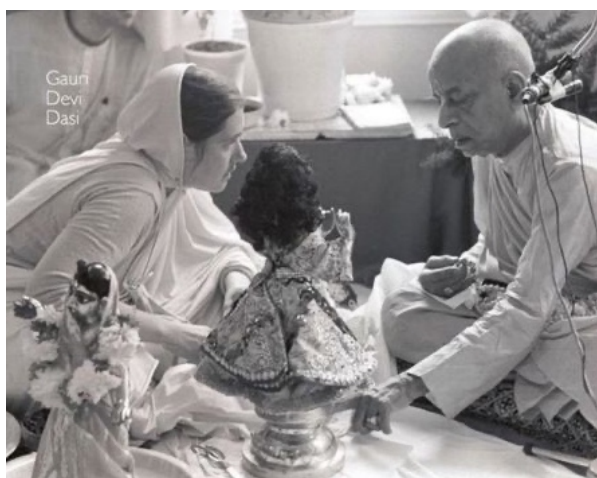
Yadubara Dasa and his wife, Visakha Devi Dasi, receiving *brahmaṇa* initiation. In the back, Srila Prabhupada's sister (and godsister) Bhavatarini Devi Dasi

Srila Prabhupada emphasizes this idea again and again: "Everyone who will join this Kṛṣṇa Society movement, he is more than a *brāhmaṇa* . . . A devotee is more than *brāhmaṇa*. The brahminical culture is included already." (Lecture on Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura's Appearance Day, Atlanta, 2 March 1975) We are obviously talking about serious devotees, not just casual worshipers, but this concept certainly applies to both men and women.

Srila Prabhupada officialized the brahminical status of his diligent followers - men and women - through formal *brāhmaṇa* initiations: "I am pleased to accept the devotees; Tirthakara das, Mahavidya das, Jagatam dasi, Jagannathisvare dasi, for second initiation. Now, hold a fire *yajna* for devotees only. Let the new *brāhmaṇas* hear the tape of me chanting Gayatri in their right ears." (Letter to Vicitravirya 10 Dec 1976) Just another example: "I accept the following as twice-born *brāhmaṇas*: Janaladha das, Manipuspaka dasi, Manisa dasi, Damodara Pandit das, Kalanidhi das, Uttamauja das, Ajitananda das and Mudhakari devi dasi." (Letter to Kirtanananda, 10 Nov 1975) Do I need to say more? (No, for normal people I don't; but neo-*smārtas* will argue till the end of Kali-yuga.)

How Could They Worship the Deities Otherwise?

If - for argument's sake - Srila Prabhupada did not consider his women disciples as *brāhmaṇas*, how could he engage them in Deity worship? In fact, he said: "It is not the monopoly of India that only *brāhmins* are born there. No. No, you are all *brāhmaṇas*. Otherwise, how can I allow you to worship Deity?" (Morning Walk, Los Angeles, 8 Dec 1973)



In one of many examples, in a letter to a disciple, Srila Prabhupada clearly stated that he was making her a twice-born *dvija*: "We have also established worship of the Deity in our temple so that all day long one will automatically think of Krishna, He is so kind. So now Kirtanananda Maharaj has recommended you for twice born initiation. *Dwija*: *dwi* means twice and *ja* means birth. Now you finish your old birth with the fire of Krishna consciousness. Worship Krishna

with love. That is the qualification for Deity worship. If you love Krishna, you will worship Him very nicely." (Letter to Vajresvari, 7 Oct 1974)

The Goswamis who wrote *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* included the following verses:

*evaṃ śrī bhagavān sarvaḥ
śālagrāma śilātmakaḥ
dvijaiḥ strībhiś ca sūdrais ca
pūjyo bhagavataḥ paraiḥ*

"Therefore, everyone [meaning every Vaisnava] - whether a *brāhmaṇa*, woman, or *sūdra* - should engage in worshipping the Supreme Lord in His form as the *śālagrāma-śilā*, after being duly initiated." (HBV 5.450)

*striyo vā yadi vā sūdrā
brāhmaṇāḥ kṣatriyādayaḥ
pūjyayitvā śilā cakram
labante śāśvataṃ padam*

"It does not matter whether one is a woman, *sūdra*, *brāhmaṇa*, or *kṣatriya*, anyone [i.e., Vaisnava] who worships the *śālagrāma-śilā* attains the eternal abode of the Supreme Lord." (From *Skanda Purāṇa*, quoted in HBV 5.452)

Are the neo-*smārtas* going to say that the Vrindavana Goswamis who transmitted these traditional *śāstric* statements were feminists? Dear reader, please forget all the utterly irrational propositions you may have heard from the neo-*smārtas* such as that women have no *varṇa*; that women can only be considered *brāhmaṇas* if married to *brāhmaṇas*, and so on. Srila Prabhupada certainly initiated unmarried women as *brāhmaṇas*. In at least one case in which the wife was initiated as a *brāhmaṇa* and the husband wasn't, Srila Prabhupada suggested that the wife could chant the mantra and do the fire sacrifice for the husband's second initiation. Addressing the husband, Srila Prabhupada writes: "Even though you have had no gayatri mantra, still you are more than brahmin. I am enclosing herewith your sacred thread, duly chanted on by me. Gayatri mantra is as follows . . . [Srila Prabhupada encloses the Sanskrit text] Ask your wife to chant this mantra and you hear it and if possible hold a fire ceremony as you have seen during your marriage and get this sacred thread on your body. Saradia, or any twice-initiated devotee, may perform the ceremony." (Letter to Vaikunthanatha and Saradia, 4 April 1971)

If someone says that ISKCON Vaisnavi cannot be *brāhmaṇas*, you should know that that person is either ignorant or hostile to the teachings of the Founder-*Ācārya*.

Debunking the Boston Rebellion Myth

A favorite neo-*smārta* fantasy: "In the late '60s Srila Prabhupada started giving *brāhmaṇa* initiations; but only to men. Women revolted. Srila Prabhupada sheepishly surrendered to his female disciples' demands and, reluctantly, started to give *brāhmaṇa* initiation to them too. But it was meant to be a temporary adjustment, a reaction to the fiery belligerence and wild feminism of these Western women; something to be corrected once the movement became more mature, more Vedic."

The above narrative is completely fabricated. It's devoid of any historical support or evidence, oral or written. It's also contrary to everything we know about Srila Prabhupada and his teachings. This fictitious story often resurfaces in neo-*smārta* lore, often embellished by new, colorful, melodramatic but imaginary details. Neo-*smārta* stalwarts pass on the fib to their new recruits and the falsehood can become entrenched in institutional memory.

Recently, for instance, a younger but staunch neo-*smārta* publicly and solemnly declared: "One important aspect relating to the differences between men and women that the neo-liberals don't bring up is the fact that Srila Prabhupada only gave Brahmanical initiation to the women after they rejected him for not doing so."



The May 1968 Boston "rebellion" as imagined by the neo-smārtas.

Someone else wrote: "the women . . . revolted and pushed back threatening him to leave ISKCON."

So, the early women disciples of Srila Prabhupada "rejected him" for not giving them second initiation, "threatening him to leave ISKCON." How bad these early ISKCON women must have been! Since such preposterous poppycock is being blatantly and unashamedly advertised, it's high time to set the historical record straight.

Oral records indicate that Srila Prabhupada started giving second initiations in 1967, in India, first to Kīrtanānanda dāsa and Acyutānanda dāsa. The next Gāyatrī initiations took over three days on 6th, 7th, and 9th May 1968, in Boston. The three women that received Gāyatrī initiations at that time were Jadurani Devi Dasi, Govinda Dasi, and Annapurna Devi Dasi. On May 6th, Śrīla Prabhupāda gave the Gāyatrī mantras to some men disciples. Govinda dāsī said that she had initially stayed away because she was upset that the men had asked Śrīla Prabhupāda for Gāyatrī mantra while he was in ill health. Govinda dāsī said that she entered in the middle of the ceremony, and Śrīla Prabhupāda told her, "Yes, I couldn't imagine how you could stay away." Jadurāṇī Devī dāsī and Annapūrṇā Devī dāsī declared that they were present, but that the men kept them the back and away from the ceremony (on the first day).

The next day, on May 7th, according to Govinda dāsī and Jadurāṇī Devī dāsī, Śrīla Prabhupāda held Gāyatrī initiations for them and Annapūrṇā Devī dāsī entirely of his own volition - without prior discussion and even without their requesting it. No pleas. No appeals. No threats. Nothing of the sort.



The real mood of the early days in Boston. Did neo-smārtas mistake a street harinama for a feminist protest?

Jadurāṇī Devī dāsī wrote: "Brahmānanda suggested that Śrīla Prabhupāda had given brāhmaṇical initiation to us girls only because he knew in his heart that we were upset and he wanted to please us. I didn't believe that at all . . . I knew at least that he is a bona fide representative of an unbroken chain of disciplic succession of self realized gurus. He would not have initiated such a major change to scriptural procedures just to please a couple of young women." (*The Art of Spiritual Life*)

A slightly extenuating factor in the neo-*smārtas'* bogus rendition - which doesn't justify their cooking up forgeries - is the fact that Satsvarūpa Mahārāja narrated the episode of these brahminical initiations in a particular way - but nothing even close to the neo-*smārta* versions. Maharaja said that Govinda dāsī was late because she was upset that she was not included in the initiation and feigned illness - but Govinda dāsī says she was late because she was upset that some devotees had pressured Srila Prabhupāda to have an initiation when Srila Prabhupada had been ill. Satsvarupa Mahārāja wrote, "Prabhupāda could detect their mentality, although they didn't openly voice their complaints." Satsvarūpa Mahārāja - without providing any supporting evidence - supposed that the *brāhmaṇa* initiations of the three women took place as Srila Prabhupāda's response to their alleged dissatisfaction. In a more recent email correspondence, Satsvarūpa Maharaja said that the impression he had at the time is what he wrote in the *Lilāmṛta*. In other words, it was a subjective perception, not corroborated by anything that anyone, and especially Srila Prabhupada, ever said or wrote. In any case, even taking Satsvarūpa Maharaja's personal version literally, there was no rejection, no pushing, no bullying, no demands - and not even any verbalized expression of disappointment or request. All those falsities were later added by the irresponsible neo-*smārta* chroniclers.

And they keep adding fictitious fantasies, such as the recent comment on social media: "[Srila Prabhupada did] not want to give them surya gayatri mantra, but only did so under duress of extortion by some of the women who threatened to leave ISKCON if he did not comply." Wow! "Extortion"... Srila Prabhupada acting "under duress"... Threats to leave ISKCON... Where did all this come from? It came from the neo-*smārta*, anti-Gaudiya, pseudo-Vedic agenda; that's where all these fabrications came from. They start with a false premise, one infused with fanatical caste-consciousness: "Women can never become *brāhmaṇas*," and then they build up a false narrative to explain away the facts.

The made-up account, if not debunked, could have significant repercussions on our perception of the Founder-*Ācārya* and on ISKCON's socio-philosophical policies. Anyone can connect with those three ladies, all still among us, and confirm that

there was no threat, no mutiny, no rejection, no protests. There is a YouTube video with testimonials from two of them, and, although they report that they were upset, none of them and no other witnesses - ever said there was pressure from these ladies to get initiated. Govinda Dasi and Jadurani Devi Dasi - two of the three women that took second initiation in Boston, May 1968 - went on record saying that there wasn't any revolt or any threat. They declared that they didn't pressurize Srila Prabhupada in any way; in fact, they didn't even request the *brāhmaṇa* initiation. Even the men who were present never reported any verbal expression by the women, or any exchange between the women and Srila Prabhupada; still, more 55 years later, the neo-*smārtas* are still marketing the "rebellion" version. Someone even created an acronym for the fictional event! The "ISKCON Boston Women's Rebellion (IBWR)" and started calling it "the IBWR incident."

Recently, someone contacted Govinda Dasi, seeking clarity about the episode, and she replied by email: "It is interesting that you are asking this now, because a few months ago some devotees in Alachua asked Goursundar (my husband at that time) the same thing. They wanted to know what happened with this second initiation issue. He replied, 'There really wasn't any issue. Govinda dasi just didn't know that the girls' initiation was already planned for the next evening because she was in the kitchen cooking for Prabhupada! She got upset, only because she didn't know.' Jadurani, who was also initiated the following evening, as well as Anapurna devi (a young British girl) also told me the same thing. She understood that our initiation would be the following evening, because there were several young men to be initiated the first evening, and it would have kept Prabhupada up late. (And that would definitely have upset me!) Yes, I will admit to being a silly young girl who got upset for no good reason. We know that is how 20 year olds sometimes are! But I think that a handful of men have capitalized on this small episode to make changes (improvements unapproved by Prabhupada) that do not really make sense."

New neo-*smārta* recruits are still adding imaginary details that, besides being utterly untrue, paint a picture of the Founder-*Ācārya* as a wimpy pushover, willing to compromise the standards of the *sampradāya* and corrupt the system of initiations to appease a few disgruntled American girls. Srila Prabhupada, who never compromised on principles, is presented as a weak-minded patsy bending to feministic whims.

Someone started preaching that giving women second initiation was part of "some of the little accommodations he made for his immature hippie followers. We should be sure to understand that these accommodations are not meant to be for all time

and were only utilized in a emergency situation." Hippy women were apparently so attached to second initiation that they threatened their spiritual master with a walkout if not given it. A completely fictitious and abusive depiction of loyal, dedicated Vaisnavis (Vaisnavis, not hippies). This allegation also introduces the deceitful idea of an "emergency situation." But the fact is different: for the whole time Srila Prabhupada stayed on the planet, he maintained the same standards of *brāhmaṇa* initiation - for men and women - as he followed in May 1968.



Engaging Vaisnavis in Deity worship? Wrong!

Are the neo-*smārtas* suggesting that the "emergency situation" lasted for more than nine years? Do they want us to believe that Srila Prabhupada remained hostage of the whims of Western women for more than nine years? That he was incapable of freeing himself from their brutal domination over him, unable to refuse their unreasonable demands? This is the picture the neo-*smārtas* paint of the Founder-*Ācārya*: the helpless puppet of ruthless feminists. The absurdity of the proposition is obvious for whoever has any degree of acquaintance with Srila Prabhupada.

One more speculation, also publicly expressed: "Srila Prabhupada made a slight adjustment against his will due to the American culture." Yes, because it's an established aspect of "the American culture" that American women, approximately from the time of Abraham Lincoln, chant Gayatri mantras three times a day.

Someone started rationalizing that "not everything Srila Prabhupada did and said was meant to be the new standard . . . Srila Prabhupada made accommodations at the time due to an emergency situation but intended to introduce a higher standard

when possible." What emergency? The commenter doesn't say. Obviously certain things that Srila Prabhupada did were not meant to become permanent standards. For instance, in the evening of the first initiation in New York, in 1966, at the end of the ceremony everyone went home, and Srila Prabhupada washed the pots from the feast. That wasn't meant as a perennial standard: "After every initiation, the *diksa-guru* must wash the pots." And in fact, very soon the devotees learned to do much better than that; but initiating ladies as *brāhmaṇas* was something Srila Prabhupada continued to do for the rest of his life. And he left zero instructions or indications that the practice should be stopped or modified in the future.

The neo-*smārtas* conclude that *brāhmaṇa* initiations to women took place only because Srila Prabhupada was forced to pacify the rabid, ferocious feminists. It was a mistake, and we should stop making it. ISKCON now needs to rectify the adharmic situation, and finally *STOP GIVING GAYATRI-MANTRAS TO LOWLY WOMEN!* Srila Prabhupada was wrong in giving them second initiation, but now we - who know much better than him - should fix his blunder.¹⁴



¹⁴ When dealing with such utter nonsense, the spontaneous mode of expression tends to shift to profanities and swearwords; but, since cultured readers won't appreciate expletives, I am restraining myself.

Gauḍīya-vaiṣṇavism: Freedom from Casteism



Someone shared a quote from the installation of "Śrī Śrī Rukmiṇī Dvārakānāth" in Los Angeles, on 16 July 1969: "According to Vedic system, a boy born in a *brāhmaṇa* family, he is allowed all the *samskāras*, reformatory, purificatory process, but the girl is not.

Why? Now, because a girl has to follow her husband. So if her husband is *brāhmaṇa*, automatically she becomes *brāhmaṇa*. There is no need of separate reformation. And by chance she may be married with a person who is not a *brāhmaṇa*, then what is the use of making her a *brāhmaṇa*? That is the general method."

Srila Prabhupada clarifies that he is talking about the "Vedic system," not about the standards he established in his Society. He says, "That is the general method." He is giving a glimpse of a method he had no intention of implementing in ISKCON and never implemented; a "general method" for previous times.

In fact, Srila Prabhupada instructs us not to worry about Vedic *varṇāśrama*: "Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu advises that we not worry about the Vedic system of *varṇāśrama-dharma*." (Cc Madhya, 6.178, purport) The Vedic system is based on birth, and the social classifications (castes) depend on birth (and on the *samskaras* before birth, etc.). It's not sometimes practicable now. So we should "not worry about" it. The Gauḍīya *ācāryas*, and certainly Srila Prabhupada, didn't "worry about" it. In fact, just the opposite, he worried about us trying to become too Vedic; that's why "Prabhupada said . . . 'According to the *Manu-samhita* you are all *mlecchas* and *yavanas*. You cannot touch the *Manu-samhita*, what to speak of translating it. So if you try to follow the *Manu-samhita* then you become a *mleccha* and *yavana* and your career is finished.'" (Letter to Madhusudana, by Tamal Krishna Gosvami, Secretary to Srila Prabhupada, 19 May 1977)

Trying to be Vedic, someone shared on social media another excerpt from the same lecture: "Even born in a Brahmin family, a woman is taken as woman, not as

Brahmin." Perhaps he didn't know (or conveniently "forgot") that *in the same lecture* Srila Prabhupada had already explained that *nobody* in this age - man or woman - is taken as a *brāhmaṇa* by birth: "In this age it is accepted as a fact by the *śāstras, kalau śūdra-sambhavaḥ. In this age nobody is actually bona fide brahmins by birth.*" Neo-*smārtas* rejoice when they hear that women are not *brāhmaṇa* by birth, but they disregard the fact that *nobody* is *brāhmaṇa* by birth. The neo-*smārtas* tried hard to squeeze some support from that lecture, but the overall context and message completely demolishes their conjectures.



Srila Prabhupada lecturing in Los Angeles

Let's remember that this is a lecture during the installation of Rukmini-Dvarakadish in Los Angeles; Srila Prabhupada says: "Without being purified you cannot touch Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa." Srila Prabhupada never said that a woman must be married to a *brāhmaṇa* before she can "touch Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa." No, every woman can adopt the process of *bhakti*, she can then take first initiation,

she can then take second initiation, and she can then serve as a *pujari* and "touch Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa." (And then reach Krishnaloka.)

In fact, in this very lecture Srila Prabhupada says: "*Bhagavad-gītā* says equal opportunity for everyone." Those who don't like Krishna's teachings can do whatever they like. They can join the ISIS, join the Taliban, join the Ku Klux Klan... the world has plenty of options for those who don't like Gaudiya-vaisnavism.

The norms for previous ages that Srila Prabhupada mentions in the lecture are just that, *norms for previous ages*. Description is not prescription. Let me repeat this because it's such an important parameter for those who wish to sincerely follow the Founder-*Ācārya*: *describing* something is not the same as *prescribing* it. Even in the *Gīta* we see Krishna "describing" *astanga-yoga* to Arjuna without "prescribing" it to him. In the Fourth Canto Srila Prabhupada describes the Pracetas meditating under water; but it doesn't mean that his followers should do the same.

He didn't teach that for women was sufficient to get married to a *brāhmaṇa* because for them "there is no need of separate reformation." That's an anachronistic custom,

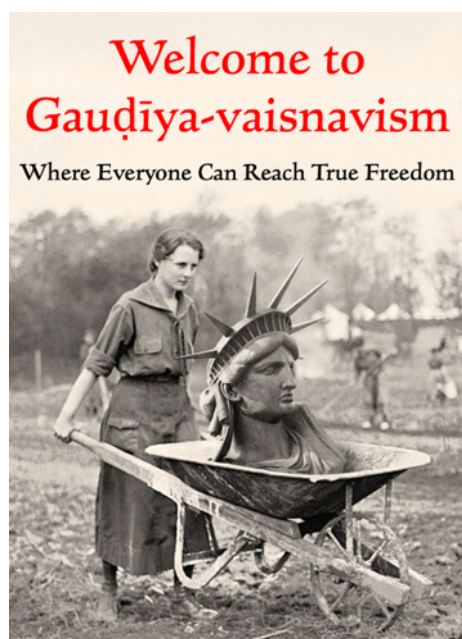
a mere description of something outdated and irrelevant for us. He did encourage women to get married, but he never said that without marriage women can't reach perfection. For instance, in a conversation in Washington DC, on 6 July 1976, he explained:

Prabhupāda: If one can remain without marriage, that is the first class.

Rūpānuga: Women also?

Prabhupāda: Women also. What is the use of this material husband? Make Kṛṣṇa husband. Kṛṣṇa's prepared to become everything—love Him as husband, love Him as son, love Him friend.

Those promoting that for women "there is no need of separate reformation" are simply showing that they don't understand Srila Prabhupada. He initiated both men and women with the same vows, the same number of rounds, and the same seven mantras at *brāhmaṇa* initiations (seven, not six - I am stressing this as some people are toying with the unauthorized idea of introducing *Gayatri-light* initiations for women). Neo-*smārtas* aspire for different promises at first initiation:



Welcome to
Gauḍīya-vaiṣṇavism

Where Everyone Can Reach True Freedom

- For men: chanting sixteen rounds a day.

- For women: cooking sixteen round chapatis a day.

In conclusion: the quote from the Rukmini-Dvarakadhisa installation is in fact a misquote, a non-quote, a quote completely taken out of context and misrepresented, but since this important lecture was brought to our attention, let's note Srila Prabhupada's conclusion in that lecture: "Real thing is *bhakti*," which is something neo-*smārtas* hardly talk about. Welcome to Gauḍīya-vaiṣṇavism.

"If You Can Remain *Brahmacāriṇī* That Is Very Nice, Very Nice"

More than one year before the Rukmini-Dvarakadhisa installation, Srila Prabhupada had already spoken in a similar way, *describing* the ways of the past, but without *prescribing* them. Very clearly Srila Prabhupada explained that the idea that women

don't take gayatri initiation (because they simply share the credits from their husband), is something from bygone times. Please notice how he uses the past tense: "there was no necessity" (to initiate women as *brāhmaṇas*): "Therefore initiation, to the woman, there is no need of, I mean to say, sacred thread, because she's considered to be the half body of her husband. She's half-shareholder in everything of the husband; therefore there was no necessity." (Initiation Lecture, Boston, 21 May 1968) That's a thing of the past.

In the same lecture Srila Prabhupada also debunks another favorite neo-*smārta* myth, that women don't have a social status or identity unless married (again please notice the use of the past tense: "every girl was compulsorily married by the father"):

"The idea is woman, every woman, is supposed to be married. Of course, in your country it is not very compulsory, not very essential. In India is still, but it is gradually declining . . . Those who are *brahmacārīs*, please follow the rules. If to remain as *brahmacārī* is disturbing, get yourself married—live peacefully, husband and wife. Of course for woman, there is no such rule for becoming *brahmacārī*, because every girl was compulsorily married by the father. But anyway, if you can remain *brahmacārīṇī* that is very nice, very nice. But if not, get yourself married, live peacefully." (Initiation Lecture, Boston, 21 May 1968)



At times, Srila Prabhupada did encourage girls to get married, but "it is not very compulsory" and if women "can remain *brahmacārīṇī* that is very nice, very nice." But it may not be "very nice" for the men, who would thus remain unprotected.

Women: Protectors of Men



Neo-*smārtas* are very fond of the litany: "women must always be protected; first by the father; then by the husband; and then by the son." They enjoy repeating this maxim ad nauseam and ad infinitum. But they *conveniently* forget that all human beings, male and female, are first protected, and for an extended period, by their mothers. It would be embarrassing for them to be reminded that it was a

woman who, for years (after carrying them for nine months in her womb), fed them, clothed them, washed them, wiped their body discharges, toilet-trained them, reassured them when they were afraid, put them to sleep, woke them up, made sure they went to school, etc. etc. etc. It was a woman who gave them most love.

And this last point is possibly the most sensitive of all: without getting into names, I have it on good authority that some of the leading neo-*smārtas* didn't experience sufficient motherly love, the essential element for growing up into a secure, balanced adult. A love that is the foundation for becoming healthy members of *varṇāśrama* - in all *varṇas* and *āśramas*. If the leading neo-*smārtas* had not suffered so much emotional deprivation as children, probably there wouldn't have been any need for this book.

But for now let's set aside childhood considerations, and let's recognize that, yes, the husband (if he is a good man) protects the wife, but the wife also protects the husband. Research abounds on how married men are healthier, wealthier, and happier than single ones. Confirming secular studies on the subject, Srila Prabhupada explains:

"The bodily senses are considered plunderers of the fort of the body. The wife is supposed to be the commander of the fort, and therefore whenever there is an attack on the body by the senses, it is the wife who protects the body from being smashed. The sex demand is inevitable for everyone, but one who has a fixed wife is saved from the onslaught of the sense enemies. A man who possesses a good wife does not create a disturbance in society by corrupting virgin girls. Without a fixed wife, a man becomes a debauchee of the first order and is a nuisance in society — unless he is a trained *brahmacārī*, *vānaprastha* or *sannyāsī* . . . There are so many



instances of falldown, even for great yogīs like Viśvāmitra. A *grhastha* is saved, however, because of his faithful wife." (SB 3.14.20, purport)



This *varṇāśrama* precept has already been empirically demonstrated. Just to cite a couple of studies: "Married men and married women live, on average, two years longer than their unmarried counterparts. One reason for this longevity benefit is the influence of marital partners on healthy behaviors. Study after study shows that married people eat better and are less likely to smoke and drink excessively. However, men married to women tend to see additional longevity benefits than women married to men."¹⁵ In other words, health-wise is more advantageous for the husbands to be married than vice-versa.

"A major survey of 127,545 American adults found that married men are healthier than men who were never married or whose marriages ended in divorce or widowhood. Men who have marital partners also live longer than men without spouses . . . the longer a man stays married, the greater his survival advantage over his unmarried peers."¹⁶ From the same article, something that the "keep-young-girls-illiterate" party should take note of: "a 2009 study reported that men married to more educated women also enjoyed a lower death rate than men married to less educated women." Logically, better educated wives can offer better protection.

So, the *damsel-in-distress* narrative, the defenseless woman desperately needing and seeking a protector - even if partially or occasionally true - it's only part of the story. The other part of the story is that men - unless rigorously trained as *brahmacārīs* and naturally comfortable with the lifestyle of detachment - tend to self-sabotage when not protected by a wife. They also tend to destroy other people's lives. As Srila Prabhupada put it above: "**Without a fixed wife, a man becomes a debauchee of the first order and is a nuisance in society.**"

So, dear men readers, do your best to protect the women in your life (and remember to protect them not only physically or financially, but also to protect their

¹⁵ <https://fortune.com/.../why-are-married-men-healthier-on.../>

¹⁶ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/.../marriage-and-mens-health>

enthusiasm for devotional service, for missionary activities, and for becoming the best they can be). Protect them but remember that they are also protecting you, because it's likely that a man without a woman would be only a slackening loafer; an incurable lollygagger; an immature goldbricker; an irredeemable nonsense.

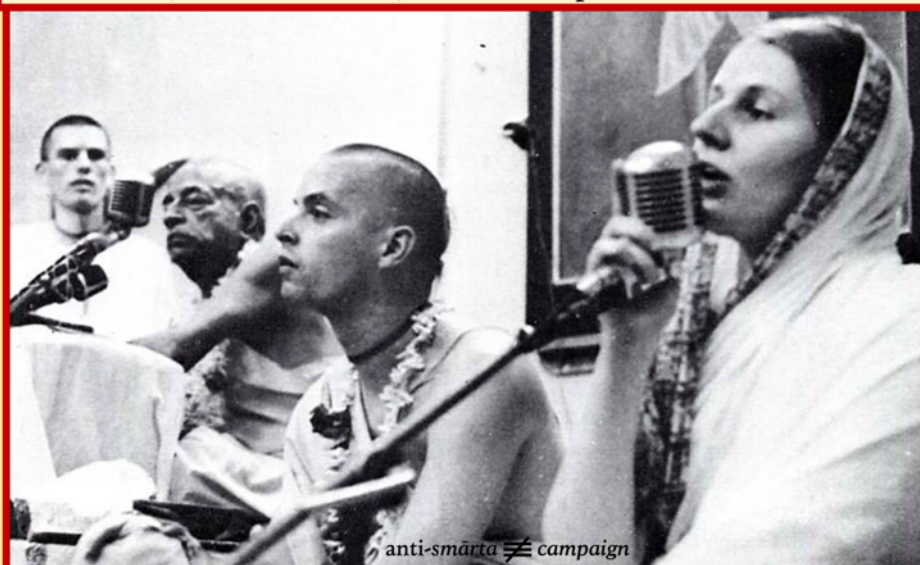
Let's be honest and remember that Srila Prabhupada wrote: **"Family life is compared to a fortress for practicing sense control."** (SB 5.1, Summary) and that **"The wife is supposed to be the commander of the fort."** (SB 3.14.20, purport) In other words, if a wife doesn't protect you, you are likely to become the debauchee that responsible men should protect women from. In short, dear male reader, according to the Founder-*Ācārya* and to modern research, your choice is among three basic lifestyles:

1. Be a genuine renunciant.
2. Be a nonsense, a dangerous crook from whom women should be protected.
3. Get protected by a woman.

Take your pick (for most people, I suggest number 3).

Srila Prabhupada, Harbinger of a New Era of Women's Empowerment

Himavati Devi Dasi speaking to the public in India - from left to right: her husband, Hamsaduta Das, Srila Prabhupada and Kirtanananda Swami.



Śrīla Prabhupāda,
CC *Adi*, 7.31.32,
purport:

“since both the boys and girls are being trained to become preachers, those girls are not ordinary girls but are as good as their brothers who are preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness.”

The default-setting for married Vaisnavis is to first take care of their husbands and children - so that husbands don't self-destroy (God knows husbands need serious help with that) and so that children can grow into emotionally balanced and civilized adults. When that's accomplished (the husbands and children are well-fed, decently dressed, and able to function as passable human beings), wives can focus on other duties, such as spreading the *sankirtana* movement.

Husbands and wives can do that together, of course, and please Lord Caitanya through their collaborative, divine *yajna*. I am sharing from a letter that I believe

Serving the Husband (or the Wife) & Serving the Guru: Not Mutually Exclusive



anti-smārta ≇ campaign

encapsulates Srila Prabhupada's mood and desire for *grihasthas*, his "default-setting" vision for dedicated devotee couples (and by *dedicated* I don't mean full-time missionaries). This letter shows his wish to see married couples serving the mission together. There is nothing in it (or anywhere else in Srila Prabhupada's books, lectures, letters, and conversations) saying that the wife's *exclusive duty* is to serve the husband. Please note that in this letter Srila Prabhupada doesn't describe an exception, a special person, or an extraordinary couple; he clearly mentions that his comments refer to "many other cases also":

"I am very glad that you both, husband and wife, are executing the mission of Lord Chaitanya so nicely and faithfully. Please continue to act like that and certainly Lord Chaitanya will bestow all His blessings and power upon you . . . in this case and in many other cases also, I find that my disciples combined together, husband and wife, are doing this preaching work so nicely. So I am especially proud how my householder disciples are preaching Lord Chaitanya's Mission. This is a new thing in the history of the Samkirtan Movement. In India all the acharyas and their descendants later on acted only from the man's side. Their wives were at home because that is the system from old times that women are not required to go out. But in Bhagavad Gita we find that women are also equally competent like the men in the matter of Krishna Consciousness Movement. Please therefore carry on these

missionary activities, and prove it by practical example that there is no bar for anyone in the matter of preaching work for Krishna Consciousness." (Letter to Himavati, 20 Dec 1969)

So, "wives were at home because that is the system from old times that women are not required to go out." Neo-*smārtas* obsess about winding back the clock to a past age, to "the system from old times." They agonize over sentences such as: "women are also equally competent like the men in the matter of Krishna Consciousness Movement," because such statements clash with their prejudices; but Srila Prabhupada, among many other things, came to announce, welcome, and celebrate a new era of women's empowerment.

The Prescribed Duties for the Golden Age

On social media, a staunch neo-*smārta* argued that women don't have the "prescribed duties" of a *varṇa*: "A key point . . . is that although women may have *guṇa* and *karma*. What they don't have is the prescribed duties of a particular *varṇa*. Nowhere in *śāstra* will you find any prescribed duties based on a woman's *varṇa*."

But *śāstra* clearly and repeatedly say that to understand Vedic knowledge we should go to guru. A man or a woman who does that will receive many devotional "prescribed duties." Srila Prabhupada might not have labelled those duties in terms of *varṇa*, but those tasks and assignments certainly constitute "prescribed duties" (which naturally resonate with the *guṇa* and *karma* of the individuals - their *varṇa*, so to speak). For instance:

"So far as the woman distributors who have left New York and Boston Temples and have gone to New Vrindaban, they should return immediately and resume their original service. In Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's Movement, everyone is preacher, whether man or woman it doesn't matter . . . Everyone should go out." (Letter to Karandhara, 6 Oct 1973)



Prabhupāda: . . . we require teachers for teaching the small children. So our, these girls, they cannot take this charge of teaching?

Akṣayānanda: Yes, one is already teaching now . . . Every afternoon she teaches the children . . .

Gopāla Kṛṣṇa: There's also one in Bombay. She used to be a public school teacher in England. After the school is open she can come over here. And there's one in Māyāpur, but she's teaching in Māyāpur.

Prabhupāda: Similarly, other girls, they can take up this.

(Morning Walk, Vrindavana, 3 Dec 1975)



Prajāpati: Nara-nārāyaṇa Prabhu's good wife is expert artist . . .

Prabhupāda: Yes, she is very nice, good artist. Give her engagement like this.

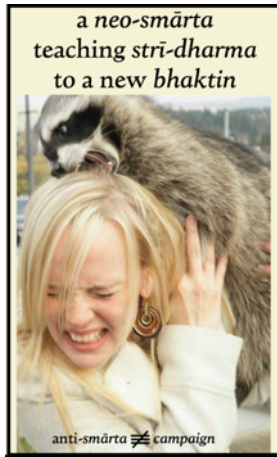
(Morning Walk, Los Angeles, 3 Jan 1974)

"I think you are the most clever manager, better than your husband, because you are organizing temple routine very nicely for serving the deities and this will have very good results for everyone." (Letter to Himavati, 17 Nov 1971)

And these are just a few examples. So, let's encourage all Vaisnavas and Vaisnavis to serve Krishna according to their *guṇa* and *karma* and **"this will have very good results for everyone."**

Where does Srila Prabhupada say that the *only* duty of a Vaisnavi is to serve her husband and her children? Shouldn't she also serve her guru? These responsibilities aren't contradictory or mutually exclusive. Sincere devotees can harmoniously balance their various obligations (to guru, spouse, parents, children, friends, etc.)

But that devotee insisted: "You have found a few examples of exceptions made by Srila Prabhupada and are now attempting to force them on people as pristine Vedic culture." But it's totally misleading to present those instructions as "exceptions." In fact, they represent the *default setting* in Srila Prabhupada's mood and mission. The



objection provides a glimpse into the neo-*smārtas'* masterplan: separate ISKCON from its Founder-*Ācārya*, cast him aside, and replace his instructions with some anachronistic and counterproductive Hindu norms.

Yet, some readers may wonder, "Were those quotes really exceptions? Are the neo-*smārta* views of *strī-dharma* realistic and beneficial?" To dissipate such doubts, I am sharing similar references, this time also from the books, which are public, official, and universal (and meant to continue guiding us):

"This Krishna Consciousness is the most urgent need of the whole human society, and we need so many preachers, both boys and girls, to spread this message throughout the world." (Letter to Andrea Temple, 26 Feb 1968) Self-explanatory.

"So you are both exemplary Vaisnavas and I want that you, husband and wife, preach together." (Letter to Visala and Visalini, 9 May 1974) Straightforward instruction for "exemplary Vaisnavas."

"So far as opening a center in Israel . . . go there immediately. I have all blessings for this enterprise. Try and preach Krishna Consciousness in this part of the world. So you go there husband and wife with child and start a center." (Letter to Krishna Devi, 16 Feb 1971) This doesn't sound exclusively family centered.

"So you please continue your devotional service, cooking etc, and you can also keep giving *Bhagavatam* class if you like. Women in our movement can also preach very nicely. Actually male and female bodies, these are just outward



Radharani Devi Dasi, Sri Sri Radha-Gopinatha Temple, Mumbai

designations. Lord Caitanya said that whether one is *brāhmaṇa* or whatever he may be if he knows the science of Kṛṣṇa then he is to be accepted as guru." (Letter to Malati, 25 Dec 1974) I find it interesting that Srila Prabhupada spontaneously introduces the idea of women gurus...

"[W]e are thoroughly instructing both men and women how to preach, and actually they are preaching wonderfully." (Cc Adi, 7.38, purport) Self-effulgent.

"The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement needs many exalted, learned persons who will sacrifice their lives to revive God consciousness throughout the world. We therefore invite all men and women advanced in knowledge to join the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement and sacrifice their lives for the great cause of reviving the God consciousness of human society." (SB 6.10.6, purport)

The conclusion: *grihastha* devotees perform duties and obligations that are typically domestic. These include raising children, paying the bills, taking care of the house, etc. but all these do not negate (and shouldn't eclipse) the duty of serving the mission of one's guru. Therefore, Srila Prabhupada writes: "Please accept my blessings and offer the same to your good wife, Indira Dasi . . . I am very glad to know that you are both, husband and wife, working very hard and sincerely for the mission of spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and therefore Kṛṣṇa has provided these nice facilities for His service. From the appearance of the house it is very strongly built of stone brick and in good condition . . . So now develop your center with the help of the new boys and girls. You are an intelligent and educated boy and highly skilled carpenter as well as devotee and your wife is well qualified similarly . . . So you set the ideal standard of householder life for the benefit of others and they will gradually be influenced to follow your example of sincere service on Kṛṣṇa's behalf." (Letter to Vamanadev, 22 June 1970)



The idea that Vaisnavis have no "prescribed duties" besides serving their husbands cannot be corroborated by the documented instructions of the Founder-*Ācārya* and must therefore be counted as another display of neo-*smārta* disloyal bigotry. As we will see in the next section, neo-*smārta* faithlessness and heterodoxy reach their apex, their apotheosis, in their opposition to Vaisnavi *dikṣa-gurus*.

Valid Arguments Against VDG? Zero.

Neglecting the instructions of the Founder-*Ācārya* and ignoring centuries of Gaudiya-vaisnava tradition, neo-*smārtas* vociferously oppose that Vaisnavis serve as *diksa-gurus*. Fact: none of the Gaudiya-vaisnava *ācāryas* ever spoke against the principle that women can initiate disciples, but neo-*smārtas* are adamant in betraying the standards and spirit of our *sampradāya*.

Neo-*smārtas* make the amateur mistake of believing that the default setting is *not* to have Vaisnavi *diksa-gurus* (VDG). The reality is exactly the opposite: the long-standing, time-honored practice in Gaudiya-vaisnavism is that women can also serve as initiating spiritual masters. Even in centuries in which, in India and in the rest of the world, women were active exclusively at home, Gaudiya Vaisnavis were already functioning as *diksa-gurus*; and, until the advent of neo-*smārtism* in ISKCON, no bona fide spiritual authority ever objected.

I was recently invited to speak at a Zoom meeting of the ISKCON North American leadership. They asked me to present the arguments against Vaisnavi *diksa-gurus* presented through the years. Since the agenda was packed and my speech had to be short, I started with the conclusion: *there are zero valid arguments against VDG*. The anti-VDG camp, after everything is said and done, are only left with two caricatures of arguments: 1. *The Suniti Hallucination*; 2. *The Rape of the Bharadvajasamhita*. In this section I will explore and debunk both.

The Body, Oh, the Body!



Srila Prabhupada delineates the Krishna conscious attitude toward the body of devotees: "One may be a *sūdra*, *vaisya* or woman, but if one is situated in the service of the Lord in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, one should not be considered *strī*, *sūdra*, *vaisya* or lower than *sūdra*." (Cc *Madhya* 8.36, purport)

So, even seeing a devoted woman (simply) as a woman is an obstacle in devotional service. But someone may protest: "But a woman *is* a woman; is an anatomically female, adult human being. How can I stop seeing her as such?" Of course, for proper social interaction we need to identify the external features of devotees (is the body of a devotee male or female? Is the body of a devotee seven or seventy years old? Etc.). Artificially neglecting those considerations would create chaos:

"There is no distinction between man and woman . . . But so far our material body is concerned, there must be some distinction for keeping the society in order . . . Of course, because superficially, bodily, there is some distinction, so we keep women separately from men, that's all. Otherwise, the rights are the same." (Interview with Professors O'Connell, Motilal and Shivaram, Toronto, 18 June 1976)

When dealing with devotees, therefore, seeing outward distinctions should stop at the anatomical; it shouldn't trespass on the spiritual level. It may be difficult, but aren't we here to learn how to lead spiritual lives? The exterior labels shouldn't intrude into the realm of qualitative judgments: "This devotee is born in a family of dog-eaters; he is therefore less than those born in vegetarian families. This devotee is born in a woman's body; she is therefore less than those born in a man's body."



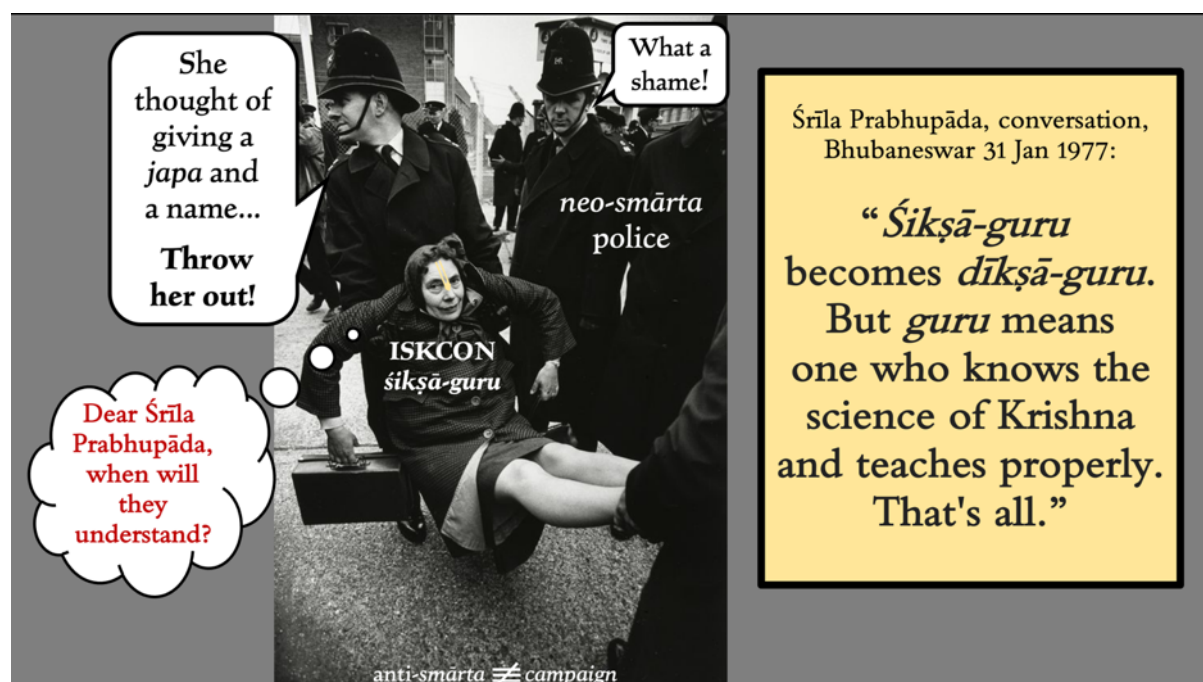
The consequences of slipping into such attitudes, Srila Prabhupada explains, are frightening: "The *Padma Purana* forbids: *viksate jati-samanyat sa yati narakam-dhruvam*. A person goes to hell quickly when he considers a devotee of the Lord in terms of birth." (Cc *Madhya* 8.36, purport) What an irony! Neo-*smārtas* might pride themselves as more Vedic, but their mundane mindset can hurl them down to dark places. The dangers are severe. The neo-*smārta* body-centered mentality can wreak havoc at every level: for the individual, the community, the institution, and ultimately for the whole humanity. Neo-*smārta* prejudices diminish the purity of the *sankirtana* movement, reduce its effectiveness, and affect its attractiveness.

Siksa But Not Diksa?

You might have heard the silly idea that women can become *siksa-gurus* but not *diksa-gurus*. Besides being against *śāstra* (there is no fundamental difference between *siksa-* and *diksa-guru*), the idea is saturated with customary *smārta* bias: "Sometimes

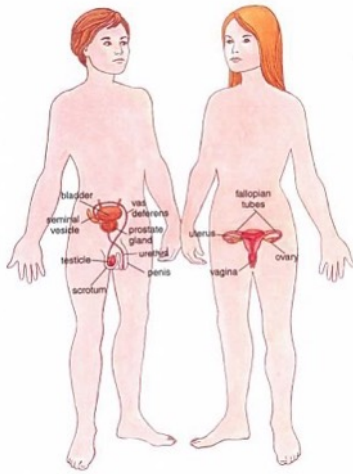
a caste guru says that *yei krsna-tattva-vettha, sei guru haya* means that one who is not a *brāhmaṇa* may become a *sikṣa-guru* or a *vartma-pradarsaka-guru* but not an initiator guru. According to such caste gurus, birth and family ties are considered foremost. However, the hereditary consideration is not acceptable to vaishnavas." (Cc *Madhya* 8.128, purport)

Neo-*smārtas* refuse to accept the simple concept: whoever can *receive* initiation, can eventually *give* initiation. That's the plain and unvarnished truth. Whoever qualifies to *receive* initiation, can and should, in the future, qualify to *give* initiation. In the words of Founder-*Ācārya* in the *Bhagavatam*: "One who is now the disciple is the next spiritual master." (SB 2.9.43, purport) Simple, no? No gender-based discrimination, no byzantine jugglery to defend the indefensible caste system. This is the logical, straightforward, and scripturally sound conclusion. But neo-*smārtas* are expert in muddling the issue and blocking the flow of spiritual energy, acting as some sort of suppressive, brutal *smārta* police.



What a *Dikṣa-guru* Does? Why *Vaiṣṇavis* Couldn't Do It?

I never heard any neo-*smārta* satisfactorily answers the following two questions (and I don't expect them to rationally answer them anytime soon):



1. What are the physical, anatomical features that make female humans incapable of transmitting spiritual instruction and giving initiation? (Another form of the same question: what is the indispensable role that male reproductive organs play in the process of initiation?)

2. Considering the service of an ISKCON *diksa-guru*: teaching the philosophy of Krishna consciousness, being exemplary in devotional behavior, offering good advice

to devotees, giving spiritual names to new initiates... which of these activities a Vaisnavi couldn't perform? (In other words, what aspect of the *diksa-guru* service description a woman would be unable to execute?)



Srila Prabhupada never said that a qualified Vaisnavi couldn't perform the service of *diksa-guru*. In fact, he almost rebuked a professor who had asked if it is possible for a woman "to be a guru in the line of disciplic succession." Srila Prabhupada's answer leaves no room for doubt: **"The qualification of guru is that he must be fully cognizant of the science of Kṛṣṇa. Then he or she can become guru. *Yeī kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā, sei guru haya.* (break) In our material world, is it any prohibition that woman cannot become professor? If she is qualified, she can become professor. What is the wrong there?"** (Interview, Toronto, 18 June 1976) Srila Prabhupada's rhetorical questions challenge and address the professor's uncertainty. In other words, how can anyone think that a woman cannot be a guru, if she is *kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā*?

The Suniti Hallucination

No, Suniti Devi wasn't suffering from hallucinations. She was a pious Vaisnava lady, the mother of the great Dhruva Maharaja, and she joined him in his journey to Vaikuntha. The "Suniti Hallucination" is what neo-*smārtas* experience when looking at a particular Srila Prabhupada' purport.

What's a hallucination? Basically, it's seeing things that are not there: "an experience involving the apparent perception of something not present." (Google) "[A] sensory

perception (such as a visual image or a sound) that occurs in the absence of an actual external stimulus and usually arises from neurological disturbance." (Merriam-Webster) The "neurological disturbance" causing the Suniti hallucination is the frantic, hopeless neo-*smārta* ambition to finding anti-VDG evidence in Srila Prabhupada's words.



(Spoiler alert: there is none to be found.) The hallucination consists in imagining a ban on VDG in the purport of SB 4.12.32 (where none exists).

The context: Dhruva is sitting on the Vaikuntha airplane and remembers his mother, who had offered him preliminary guidance in spiritual life. Srila Prabhupada declares that "Dhruva Mahārāja's mother, Sunīti, was his *patha-pradarśaka-guru*. *Patha-pradarśaka-guru* means 'the guru, or the spiritual master, who shows the way.' Such a guru is sometimes called *śikṣā-guru*." We then encounter the sentence that the neo-*smārta* mistakenly worship: "[G]enerally the *śikṣā-guru* later on becomes the *dikṣā-guru*. Sunīti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Mahārāja's *dikṣā-guru*."

That's how BBT editor Hayagriva Prabhu rendered the original transcription: "[G]enerally the siksa guru becomes later on diksa guru. Suniti, however, being in family relationship with Dhruva, his mother, and also woman, could not become the diksa guru of Dhruva Maharaja." The emphasis changes, but the essence remains. The word under examination - in both versions - is *woman*.

The neo-*smārtas* rejoice in wild abandon: "Jaya! Jaya! JAYA!!! Srila Prabhupada said 'woman.' It clearly means that ALL WOMEN can never accept disciples; FOREVER!!!" They probably also envision *devatas* showering flower petals from the heavens every time someone reads the sentence.

The sober, sane reader may wonder: "Is this what Srila Prabhupada really meant? If he wanted to say something like that, that no woman should ever become *dikṣa-guru*, why he didn't just say that, here or anywhere else? Why he only speaks of Suniti without extending the comment to include the whole gender?"

Had Srila Prabhupada taken Suniti not becoming a *dikṣa-guru* as the universal and eternal standard - for all the ages, for all women - when the topic came up in

conversation, he would have answered something like the following (not a real quote):

Prof. O'Connell: Is it possible, Swāmījī, for a woman to be a guru in the line of disciplic succession?

Prabhupāda: No, Suniti didn't become; therefore women can never be *diksa-gurus*. (Conversation that never took place; answer that was never given; in fact, just opposite of what Srila Prabhupada factually said.) If the neo-*smārta* interpretation of the Suniti episode was correct, it would be rational to expect a similar reply.

Hallucinating on SB 4.12.32, purport

Suniti did not initiate Dhruva... therefore women can never accept disciples.

conned neo-smārta

Interview, Toronto, 18 June 1976:
Prof. O'Connell: Is it possible, Swāmījī, for a woman to be a *guru* in the line of disciplic succession?
Prabhupāda: Yes . . . The qualification of *guru* is that he must be fully cognizant of the science of Kṛṣṇa. Then he or she can become *guru* . . . is it any prohibition that woman cannot become professor? If she is qualified, she can become professor. What is the wrong there?

How neo-smārtas delude themselves and others
anti-smārta ≠ campaign

A Different Age; A Different Ball Game

It turns out that in that Fourth Canto purport Srila Prabhupada was speaking only about Suniti, not about all women. His statement describes the situation (and the impediment) of a particular woman, not of the whole gender. Suniti was a woman living in Satya-yuga, a time in which humanity followed the *vaidika* system, in which women and *śūdras* couldn't even *receive* initiation, what to speak of giving it: "**Śūdras and women are not admitted to a *vaidika* initiation.**" (Cc Madhya, 24.331, purport) So, Suniti, a woman living approximately one billion nine hundred million years ago, could not give *diksa* to his son, also due to, in Srila Prabhupada's word, "**being in family relationship with Dhruva, his mother.**" So, being "**his mother and also woman**" she wasn't fit for initiating Dhruva.



Suniti pacifies and instructs Dhruva. Narada Muni approaches him. Artwork by Govinda Dasi

We shouldn't speculate about the meaning of the sentence ("Sunīti, however, being a woman, and specifically his mother, could not become Dhruva Mahārāja's *dīkṣā-guru*"). The honest conclusion is that, according to Srila Prabhupada, Suniti wasn't eligible to become Dhruva's *dikṣa-guru* at that time, in that place, and in those circumstances. We cannot extrapolate and generalize this event to completely different times, places, and circumstances; especially as Srila Prabhupada has conclusively stated that women can become initiating gurus.

Kindly notice the paradox and contradiction: the neo-*smārtas* have already accepted that some highly spiritually qualified Vaisnavi can initiate disciples (and this even within their delirious treatment of the *Bharadvaja-saṁhita*). Then why the obstinacy, the relentless mulishness in saying that Suniti's example (of not becoming Dhruva's *dikṣa-guru*) is the final word on the subject? Such intransigence is unjustified.

The whole Suniti episode was in another *yuga*, and there is zero evidence that the contemporary rules of the Gaudiya-vaisnava *saṁpradāya* were followed by Dhruva and his society. In fact, just the opposite. Neo-*smārtas* compare the two situations as if they were equivalent, but that's only a desperate and deceitful attempt. No Gaudiya *ācārya* ever supported such a conjecture.

Would a "Gaudiya Suniti" Make It?

In the society of Dhruva and his mother, which followed the material caste-by-birth *varṇāśrama* system delineated in later *smṛti-śāstra* like *Manu-saṁhita*, it would not be the position of Suniti to become a *dikṣa-guru*. Her environment was neither the

Vaisnava society we live in today, nor the Gaudiya-vaisnava society in the last 500 years. So, for argument's sake, let's not apply the *vaidika* standard, the much stricter rules for Satya-yuga society, and instead let's look at the situation purely from the Gaudiya perspective, from the much more liberal and inclusive *pancaratrika* and *bhagavata* methods upheld by Sri Caitanya:

*kibā vipra, kibā nyāsī, śūdra kene naya
yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā, sei 'guru' haya*

“Whether one is a *brāhmaṇa*, a *sannyāsī* or a *śūdra*—regardless of what he is—he can become a spiritual master if he knows the science of Kṛṣṇa.” (CC Madhya 8.128)

So, the essence is knowing the science of Krishna, not one's birth or gender. According to the Founder-*Ācārya*: "The qualification of guru is that he must be fully cognizant of the science of Kṛṣṇa. Then he or she can become guru. *Yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā, sei guru haya.*" (Interview, Toronto 18 June 1976) Let's engage in a *thought experiment*: If Suniti and Dhruva were part of the *sankirtana* movement, could Suniti have initiated Dhruva? In other words, was she sufficiently "*kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā*"? Was she really "**fully cognizant of the science of Kṛṣṇa**"? Different ways of asking the same question: was Suniti qualified as *diksa-guru*, even by the present, lenient ISKCON standards? If she was in ISKCON, would she fulfill all the prerequisites for becoming an initiating spiritual master? If we closely analyze, as objectively as possible, her situation just before Dhruva left for the forest, I believe we must honestly conclude that she falls short of the needed prerequisites.

The *Bhagavatam* explicitly describes her distressed state of mind. When Suniti heard about the rejection of Dhruva by his father, she "**became greatly aggrieved. This incident was unbearable to Sunīti's patience. She began to burn as if in a forest fire, and in her grief she became just like a burnt leaf and so lamented. As she remembered the words of her co-wife, her bright, lotuslike face filled with tears. She also was breathing very heavily.**" (SB 4.8.15-17)

These verses do not paint the picture of a clearheaded, detached, mature spiritual master, but of a disheartened and demoralized housewife, someone certainly not ready to accept disciples. Giving some spiritual and moral direction, yes, but initiation? Nah. And this, I believe, is what Srila Prabhupada may have partly implied by saying, "**and also woman**": the pious Suniti was manifesting the characteristics associated with a depressed woman.

Additionally, often the *Bhagavatam* characters - including women - erupt in scholarly praise of the Lord demonstrating their deep theological realizations (and an extraordinary capacity for poetic compositions). Think of Queen Kunti (First Canto, chapter 8) or of the ladies on the Hastinapura roofs (First Canto, chapter 10). When we analyze the chapter in which Suniti advises Dhruva, though, we don't find such philosophical fluency. What she says (SB 4.8.20-23) certainly constitutes coherent theistic advice and correct theological grasp, but on a limited scale, and her words are next to the description of her emotional turmoil.

Another issue was her motherly status. As Srila Prabhupada points out that Suniti, **"being in family relationship with Dhruva, his mother, and also woman, could not become the diksa-guru of Dhruva Maharaja."** Why would the prince take initiation from his mother? It would appear bizarre. Weren't there *brāhmaṇas*, sages or gurus in the kingdom or even in the palace itself? Visualize the scene: in later years King Dhruva is sitting on the throne and someone asks: "Your majesty, who is your *diksa-guru*?" and Dhruva answers, "My mommy." Nah. It doesn't fit the social and cultural context. Was any other *ksatriya* of the Vedic age ever initiated by his mother?

These are the real issues: the Satya-yuga *vaidika* process; Suniti's lack of credentials as a distraught woman going through vexing marital circumstances; her family relation as Dhruva's mother... In fact, the *Bhagavatam* doesn't even tell us if Suniti was herself initiated or not! Why building a universal theory from her very special situation? Suniti's status is hardly comparable to the contemporary senior ISKCON ladies who studied Srila Prabhupada's books for decades, demonstrated staunch dedication to missionary activities, showed mental and spiritual strength in facing the troubles of life, and who are directly encouraged by the Founder-*Ācārya*'s to become gurus. And who, I almost forgot to add, are all regularly initiated.



Therefore I say that the neo-*smārtas* suffer of hallucinations when they see a sentence that Srila Prabhupada never spoke, neither in this particular purport nor anywhere else (a mirage I here render in all caps): "Suniti . . . being in family relationship with Dhruva, his mother, and also woman, could not become the *diksa-guru* of Dhruva Maharaja. THEREFORE, THE CONCLUSION IS THAT ISKCON VAISNAVIS CAN NEVER BECOME DIKSA-GURU."

Ridiculous. Ridiculous and pathetic; it shows their hopelessness in finding any evidence for their theories. Neo-*smārtas*:

1. Hear an instruction Srila Prabhupada never gave.
2. Read a statement Srila Prabhupada never wrote.
3. Invent words Srila Prabhupada never spoke
4. Imagine a conclusion Srila Prabhupada never presented.

If it's a conscious deception, it's plain dishonesty. If it's an unconscious projection, it's a serious psychological problem. If it's a mixture of both, it's a typical day in Neo-*smārta-loka*.

The Rape of the *Bharadvaja-samhita*

Vedic literature, Srila Prabhupada explains, is like the mother. Mistranslating or misinterpreting *śāstra* is like raping one's mother, violating her sanctity to satisfy one's lust. That's exactly what the neo-*smārtas* do; to satisfy their unholy craving for seeing women demoted and delegitimized as spiritual teachers. Neo-*smārtas* have been raping the *Bharadvaja-samhita* for years, to satisfy their pathological anti-woman sentiments and their *apa-sampradāyic*, anti-Gaudiya appetites.

Premise

Desperately looking for anti-VDG references, and finding none, the neo-*smārtas* assaulted and raped the *Bharadvaja-samhita*. This text is an authentic *śāstra*, recognized as such by the Gaudiya *ācāryas*. The only time Srila Prabhupada mentions the *Bharadvaja-samhita* in his books, he introduces it as a text advocating radical liberality and equal opportunity (exactly the opposite of how the neo-*smārta* see it): "if the brahminical qualifications are found in the person of a *sūdra*, he should immediately be accepted as a *brāhmaṇa*. To substantiate this there are many

quotations from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, *Mahābhārata*, *Bharadvāja-saṁhitā* and the *pañcarātra*, as well as many other scriptures." (SB 4.31.10, purport)

Contrary to Srila Prabhupada's description, and contrary to the spirit and content of the text, the neo-*smārtas* try to turn the *Bharadvāja-saṁhitā* into an instrument of oppression.



Sita, Rama, and Lakṣmana at the hermitage of Bharadvāja Muni, ca. 1780.

Fact: the *Bharadvāja-saṁhitā* approves of Vaisnava Dikṣa-gurus

As we will see, the *Bharadvāja-saṁhitā* clearly says that women (as well as low-born men) can qualify to become *dikṣa-gurus*. "But then," the reader may wonder, "how can neo-*smārtas* twist that, transforming the book into their ONLY *śāstric* reference against VDG?" Neo-*smārtas* do that by corrupting the Sanskrit, mistranslating it to change the requisites for becoming guru (qualifications that we see routinely acquired in ISKCON) into extremely high and unverifiable demands.

Who Is a Bona Fide Guru?

The *Bharadvāja-saṁhitā* (1.38) establishes the qualifications of the genuine spiritual master (here I am quoting the neo-*smārta* translations, to show that their conclusions clash even with their own rendering of the text):

"Thus, one who is desirous of surrendering with faith should take shelter of a guru who is always engaged in chanting the mantra and is a knower of *bhakti-siddhānta* (*prājñam*), is always engaged, without any desire for personal benefit, in showering mercy on fallen souls (*hita-param*), who is always pure in heart or free of sins, peaceful, and always committed to his prescribed duties (ordained by his guru or by *varṇāśrama*). Such a guru should be the best of the twice-born (*dvija-varam* meaning *brāhmaṇa*)."

This is a standard Vaisnava lesson. Readers may recognize how the above perfectly matches Srila Prabhupada's definition in the Nectar of Instruction: "Out of many . . . Vaiṣṇavas, one may be found to be very seriously engaged in the service of the Lord and strictly following all the regulative principles, chanting the prescribed number of rounds on *japa* beads and always thinking of how to expand the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Such a Vaiṣṇava should be accepted as an *uttama-adhikārī* . . . the advanced *uttama-adhikārī* Vaiṣṇava devotee should be accepted as a spiritual master." (NOI 5, purport)

ISKCON devotees are familiar with these parameters: first-class devotees are first of all first-class disciples; they rigorously follow their initiation vows and dedicate their life to spread Krishna consciousness. As shown later, the *Bharadvaja-samhita*, the primary Gaudiya *śāstra*, the Gaudiya-*ācāryas*, and ISKCON's Founder-*Ācārya* are all in harmony.

The *Bharadvaja-samhita* then explains that certain social groups are more likely to become gurus, for instance *brāhmaṇas* born "in a sinless lineage . . . traceable up to seven generations." (BhS 1.39). But, the text emphasizes, even if their lineage wasn't too sinless, *brāhmaṇas* possessing *bhakti* and *jñāna-vairāgya* (knowledge and detachment), they still deserve to be gurus (*arhaty ācāryatānī*). (BhS 1.40) In the absence of those personal characteristics "one cannot become an *ācārya* even if one is born in a great family line." (BhS 1.41)

The reader may recognize the impeccable correspondence with the same message Srila Prabhupada repeatedly presented, quoting the *Padma Purana*:

*ṣaṭ-karma-nipuṇo vipro
mantra-tantra-viśāradaḥ
avaiṣṇavo gurur na syād
vaiṣṇavaḥ śva-paco guruḥ*

"A scholarly *brāhmaṇa*, expert in all subjects of Vedic knowledge, is unfit to become a spiritual master without being a Vaiṣṇava, or expert in the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. But a person born in a family of a lower caste can become a spiritual master if he is a Vaiṣṇava, or Kṛṣṇa conscious." (Bg 2.8, purport)

This is nothing new for ISKCON devotees; we have been hearing this conclusion all along, from the second chapter of the *Bhagavad-gīta* onward. The *Bharadvaja-saṃhita* concludes in the same way as the *Padma Purāna* (that qualified devotees can serve as gurus despite their problematic births and ancestries); but before that the text delineates traditional restrictions: "an *ācārya* from a lower birth or age should not initiate a person from a higher birth or age" (BhS 1.41); "a woman, a *śūdra* and an *antyaja*" or "anyone who is accused of a great sin or is fallen" cannot initiate others (*na jātu mantra-dā*) (BhS 1.42)¹⁷ Such groups, although traditionally precluded from becoming gurus (*nārhanṭy ācāryatām*) "can give ethical and moral instructions." (BhS 1.43).

But in the next verse the *Bharadvaja-saṃhita* reveals, so to speak, its inner Gaudiya spirit, declaring that all the restrictions on these traditionally interdicted categories (women, *śūdras*, etc.) are null and void when those individuals are Krishna conscious. The neo-*smārtas* hate that conclusive statement and therefore insert artificial meanings in it, fraudulently fabricating imaginary and unobservable prerequisites that can never be met or demonstrated. And why all these efforts at the risk of loss of reputation and, even worse, misrepresenting scriptures? Simply to make guruship unattainable for women. This is how they report the verse:

TEXT 44

kim apy atrābhijāyante yoginaḥ sarva-yoniṣu pratyakṣitātma-nāthānām naiṣāṃ cintyaṃ kulādikam

kim—what; *api*—if; *atra*—here; *abhijāyante*—they are born; *yoginaḥ*—yogīs; *sarva-yoniṣu*—in all possible situations in terms of birth; *pratyakṣita-ātma-nāthānām*—of those who have seen their worshipable Lord in loving devotion, due to their perfection in self-realization; *na*—not; *eṣāṃ*—of them; *cintyaṃ*—is to be considered; *kula-ādikam*—their family situation and so on.

¹⁷ Srila Prabhupada defines *antyaja* as "the mixed classes" (SB 7.11.30, purport)

"But, because perfect yogis (or *nitya-siddha* devotees) who are on the stage of *yoga-pratyakṣa* (i.e. are self-realized – seeing God face-to-face), *pratyakṣitātma-nāthas*, may take birth in any family tradition, in such cases no consideration of *kula*, gender, etc. as mentioned earlier applies (they can become *ācāryas*)."

The Rape Begins

The neo-*smārtas* transmogrify the expression "*pratyakṣitātmanāthānām*" into the indefensible interpretation "*nitya-siddha* devotees" and "seeing God face-to-face." It's absurd to talk of *nitya-siddhas* here ("eternally perfect" or "one who was never contaminated")¹⁸ as the passage explicitly talks of people who were previously considered imperfect and contaminated. So, the inclusion of "*nitya-siddha*" is totally unwarranted, illogical, and misleading.

The Sanskrit doesn't support the use of the expression "seeing God face-to-face." There is no word for *face*; what to speak of *face-to-face*. All the text talks about is a direct perception or experience of the Lord. As it's common throughout the *Gīta* to express "understanding" or "grasping" as "seeing," the forced literalism is unjustified. It's a common usage in Sanskrit (and in English as well), to refer to "seeing" or "looking" not in the strict physical sense. It's the same idea expressed by Lord Krishna in the *Gīta* by saying that the spiritual masters "can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth [*tattva-*



darśinaḥ]." (Bg 4.34) *Tattva-darśinaḥ* simply means those who understand *tattva*, the categorical truths of Existence. The same thing here, in the *Bhāradvaja-saṃhita*. We will see that the authorities have defined *pratyakṣitā* in terms of grasping the *tattva* of the Lord; not a physical (and not demonstrable) "seeing God face-to-face."

¹⁸ "*Nitya-siddha* means eternally perfect." (Lecture on SB 1.5.25, Vrindavana, 6 Aug 1974); "*nitya siddha* means one who was never contaminated." (Letter to Mukunda, 10 June 1969)



This is a crucial point because the whole question (“who can be guru?”) hinges on the correct comprehension of these expressions (*pratyakṣitātmanāthānām* and *tattva-darśinaḥ*). Let's therefore hear what Srila Prabhupada has to say: "*Tattva-darśinaḥ* means one who knows what is actually the truth." (Lecture on SB 7.9.50, Vrindavana, 5 April 1976) And, with more unpacking: "One has to approach a person who has seen God, *tattva-darśinaḥ*. How God can be seen? *Tattva-darśinaḥ*. *Tattva-darśinaḥ* means one who knows the truth. Truth means how to see. *Paśyanti jñāna-cakṣuṣa*, by the eyes of knowledge. *Paśyanti jñāna-cakṣuṣa. Śāstra-cakṣuṣāt*. Not that if somebody challenges that 'Have you seen God?' 'Yes, I have seen.'

'How?' "Through *śāstra*, through *śāstra*." (Lecture on 6.1.39, Los Angeles, 5 June 1976) Could it be more clear? "One has to approach a person who has seen God . . . by the eyes of knowledge . . . through *śāstra*." Which ISKCON guru is going to say, “Yes, I have seen God face-to-face, now you can take initiation from me”?

Perfect Agreement Between Krishna, Lord Caitanya, the *Śāstra* & the *Acāryas*

In the *Bhagavad-gīta*, Krishna defined gurus as "*tattva-darśinaḥ*" - seers of *tattva*, knowers of the ontological categories; 4,500 years later Lord Caitanya said the same thing (exquisitely backing the "equal opportunity" conclusion of the *Bharadvaja-samhita*):

*kibā vipra, kibā nyāsī, śūdra kene naya
yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā, sei 'guru' haya*

“Whether one is a *brāhmaṇa*, a *sannyāsī* or a *śūdra*—regardless of what he is—he can become a spiritual master if he knows the science of Kṛṣṇa [*kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā*].” (Cc, Madhya, 8.128)

A couple of hundred years later, our Vedanta-*ācārya*, Srila Baladeva Vidyabhusana, also stressing knowledge of *tattva* as the key prerequisite, offers the same conclusion

as Lord Caitanya. In his *Vaiṣṇavānandīnī* commentary on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.13.15), Baladeva Vidyabhusana says that women, *sūdras*, etc. are qualified if they have "a clear perception of the *para-tattva*" - *sākṣātkṛta-para-tattvānām*. To support that thesis, he specifically quotes *Bhāradvāja-saṁhita* 1.44.¹⁹ In other words, he indicates that "*pratyakṣitātma-nātha*" simply means "*tattva-vettā*" - one who has a clear grasp of the categorical Vaisnava truths (as many Vaisnavis obviously and demonstrably possess.) The reader has a choice: following the explanation of our Vedānta-*ācārya* or following the ideas of our *śāstra*-rapists.

When we approach the issue with objectivity, we witness a perfect harmony (as we would expect) between God, *śāstra* and the *ācāryas*:

- Krishna says that the qualification of the gurus is being *tattva-darsīna* (knowing the categorical truths of Reality).
- Caitanya Mahāprabhu says that the qualification of guru is being *kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā* (knowing the truth about the science of Krishna).
- And Baladeva Vidyabhusana says that the qualification of the guru is being: *sākṣātkṛta-para-tattvānām* (having a clear perception of *para-tattva*).

Another scholar writing centuries ago, Sarayū-prasāda Miśra, while commenting on the *Bhāradvāja-saṁhita*, defines "*pratyakṣitātma-nāthanām*" as "*sākṣāt-kṛta-bhāgavat-tattvānām*" - which literally means "of those who directly perceive the truth [*tattva*] of the Lord." All these authorities concur that knowing *tattva* is the central qualification; not seeing Krishna "face-to-face" in the bushes of Vrindavana.

Srila Prabhupada says the same. He expertly "translates" the concept of knowing *tattva* into having studied the *Bhāgavatam* and possessing the Bhaktivedānta degree: "*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is explaining in *tattva*, in fact, in truth, what is Kṛṣṇa. So if we learn Kṛṣṇa, if we understand Kṛṣṇa, then our life is fulfilled." (Lecture on SB 1.2.11, Vrindavana, 22 Jan 1972) Srila Prabhupada, as the *ācārya* of the age, makes the whole "*tattva*-thing" doable, observable, and certifiable: "Those possessing the title of Bhaktivedānta will be allowed to initiate disciples." (Letter to Hansadutta, 3 Jan 1969) Which makes perfect sense: "And what is that *tattva*? That is explained in

¹⁹ "ata eva bhāradvāja-saṁhitāyām strī-sūdrādīnām tan niṣidhya sākṣātkṛta-para-tattvānām teṣām tad āha: "na jātu mantra-dātāro na sūdro nāntarodbhavaḥ, nābhisāpto na patitaḥ kāma-kāmo 'py akāmitaḥ; striyaḥ sūdrādayaś caiva bodhayeyur hitāhitam, yathārhaṁ mānanīyāś ca nārhanṭy ācāryatām kvacit; kim apy atrābhijāyante yoginaḥ sarva-yoniṣu; pratyakṣitātma-nāthanām naiṣām cintyam kulādikam" iti."

the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, what is *tattva*. *Vadanti tat tattva-vidas tattvam* (SB 1.2.11). *Tattva-vid*, one who knows *tattva*, he can speak about *tattva*." (Lecture on Bg 13.13, Bombay, 6 Oct 1973)

We observe flawless harmony between all these authorities: *Bhagavad-gita*, *Padma Purana*, *Bharadvaja-samhita*, *Sri Caitanya-caritamrita*, the Gaudiya-vaisnava *ācāryas*... It's only the neo-*smārtas* who try to mislead us into thinking that the *Bharadvaja-samhita* diverges from this divine concordance; but, through the centuries and millennia, the following expressions are all equivalent:

- Lord Krishna's "*tattva-darśina*"
- Lord Caitanya's "*yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā*"
- Bharadvaja Muni's "*pratyakṣitātma-nātha*"
- Srila Baladeva Vidyabhusana's "*sākṣāt-kṛta-para-tattvānāṁ*"
- Sarayū-prasāda Miśra's "*sākṣāt-kṛta-bhagavat-tattvānām*"
- Srila Prabhupada's "Those possessing the title of Bhaktivedanta"

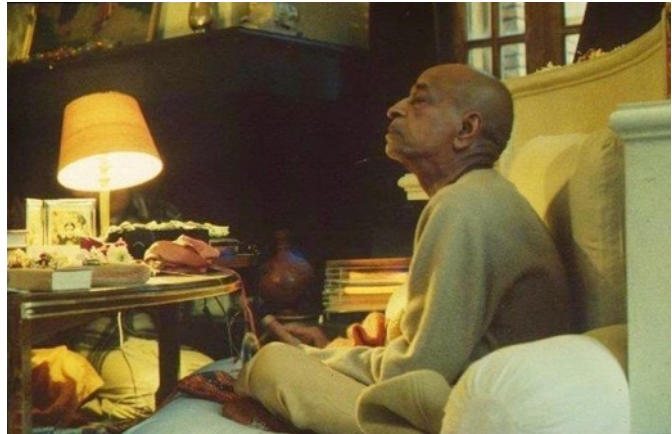
Should we be surprised that the Lord and His servants perfectly agree among themselves? Defying the *śāstra* and the *sampradāya*, the neo-*smārtas* misrepresent "*pratyakṣitātma-nāthanām*" and make ridiculous claims such as: "women are not allowed to be *dīkṣā-guru* until they are *siddha*, and residents of Goloka Vṛndavana" or until they are "on the stage of perceiving God face to face." To initiate disciples a woman must be "a pure *siddha* devotee beyond the modes of nature." She qualifies when her "identification with the material body will vanish and identification with one's spiritual body will predominate." (How is she supposed to demonstrate that?) "In that spiritual body" she "will always see Vṛndāvana and serve Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa." She can become *dīkṣā-guru* when "her *svarūpa-siddhi* becomes manifest" (is she supposed to also *show* her *svarūpa-siddhi* to prospective disciples, or a notarized declaration would suffice?) All such imaginary demands are bogus and indefensible.²⁰ On social media, an eager neo-*smārta* propagandist proclaimed (contradicting his colleagues): "By rule a woman cannot become a *diksha-guru* unless she is on the platform of *prema bhakti*." (For him *bhāva-bhakti* wasn't enough...). Unsurprisingly, he didn't produce any evidence for such "rule." Also unsurprisingly, this neo-*smārta* theorist is a member of the glorious "ISKCON India Scholars Board," together with the two main *Bharadvaja-samhita* rapists. These people are just shooting poisonous darts in the dark.

²⁰ These outrageous statements are all from the neo-*smārta* book, "Vaisnava-diksa according to Narada Pancaratra."

Betraying Bharadvaja Muni and His Descendants

The whole imaginary translation and interpretation is an insult to Bharadvaja Muni. I find intriguing and ironic that some stalwarts of Gaudiya-vaisnavism have a further, genealogical connection with Bharadvāja Muni. Srila Prabhupada explains: "Sanātana Gosvāmī and Rūpa Gosvāmī belonged to the *Bharadvāja-gotra*, which indicates that they belonged either to the family or disciplic succession of Bharadvāja Muni." (Cc Adi, 10.84, purport) Neo-*smārtas* manage to insult the *Bharadvāja-gotra*, the Gaudiya-*sampradāya*, and particularly the Founder-*Ācārya*, who explains: "As soon as personal motivation comes in it is not possible for one to understand our Krishna Consciousness philosophy." (Letter to Isana and Vibhavati, 21 Sept 1970)

For honest seekers, the Founder-*Ācārya*'s conclusion will suffice: "It doesn't matter whether one is a *gṛhastha* or one is a *sannyāsī* or one is a brahmin or not brahmin. It doesn't matter. Because this is not the science of this physiological ana... anatomical science or cobbler's science. Cobbler's science means cobbler knows what kind of skin it is. It is not like that. Neither cobbler's science nor anatomical science or physiological science. *Bhagavat-tattva-vijñānam* (SB 1.2.20). It is another science. So anyone who is well versed in *bhagavat-tattva-vijñānam*, he's... he can become guru. (NOD Lecture, Calcutta, 28 Jan 1973)



Tattva, not tattle.

Devious Trickery

The neo-*smārta* tactic is clear: desecrate the *Bharadvaja-samhita* and pile up so many imaginary requirements for women to become *diksa-gurus* (requirements that nobody can claim or demonstrate to have), and women are thus unlawfully disenfranchised. Simple but effective - effective on those victimized by the neo-*smārta* fabrications. Can any devotional community or any aspiring disciple certify that someone (man or woman) is "on the stage of perceiving God face to face"? Can any spiritual society or any prospective disciple verify that some devotees (men or women) "are *siddha*, and residents of Goloka Vṛndavana"? Would any sincere

devotee ever assert that he or she is "beyond the modes of nature"? Would any Vaisnava or Vaisnavi ever declare that his or "her *svarūpa-siddhi*" has become "manifest"? All these artificial demands are just tricks to promote a discriminatory policy based on bodily consciousness. But, as the saying goes: "When you argue with reality, you lose - but only 100% of the time." And so, while attempting their juvenile trickery, neo-*smārtas* run into insurmountable problems.

A Maha-Problem: Stopping Men Too

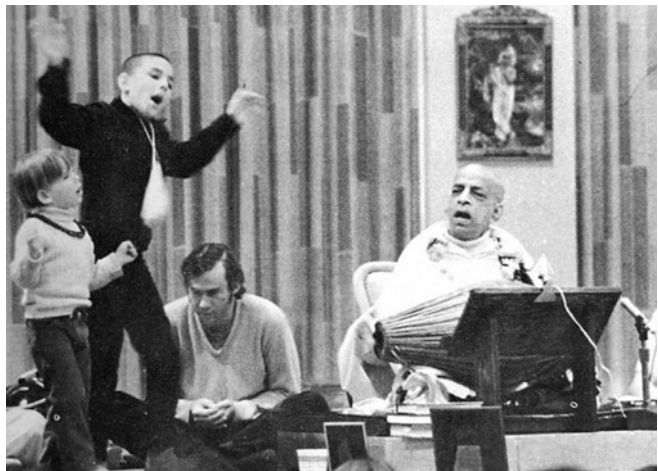
The *Bharadvaja-samhita* is crystal clear: women are only one of the various groups that in certain pre-Mahaprabhu environments wouldn't generally accept disciples. Verse 1.44 then says that when *anyone* from those classes becomes cognizant of *tattva* (*pratyakṣitātma-nātha*) he or she can act as *ācārya*. *Bharadvaja-samhita* 1.44 doesn't make any difference between men, women, etc.: all those that were previously unqualified become qualified as gurus by becoming *tattva-darśī*.

But the neo-*smārtas*, by imposing super-high and unverifiable prerequisites, automatically disqualify not just women but also everyone else (*śūdras*, *antyajas*, people who had previously been sinful, etc.). The neo-*smārtas*' misinterpretations practically end up blocking EVERYONE from becoming guru.

Their motivation was to impede women, but the result is that they prevent both women and men. Nobody can ever give initiation; because nobody can ever fulfill or demonstrate those grandiose demands. Nobody can take initiation; because no aspiring disciple can ever verify those stratospheric qualifications. The *parampara* is stuck. Congratulations, neo-*smārtas*; you did it.

Another Maha-Problem: Completely Missing the Function of *Pāñcarātra* Literature

The *pāñcarātra* scriptures serve as practical guidelines, as realistic handbooks of worship and lifestyle: "The *pāñcarātrika* system is both practical and suitable for this age of quarrel." (SB 1.5.38, purport) *Pāñcarātra* texts, such as the *Bharadvaja-samhita*, are not meant to be like, say, the Upanisads - terse, cryptic, cerebral... hard to fathom



and interpret. No, *pāñcarātri*ka śāstra are meant to be "lived" and to be "livable" by everyone in this age. But by violating the *Bharadvaja-samhita*'s internal logic and twisting its intended message, the neo-*smārtas* turn this bona fide text into unusable gibberish. In other words, by imposing contrived meanings, the neo-*smārtas* defeat the very purpose of a *pāñcarātra*, which is to offer devotees tangible directions. The neo-*smārtas* turn this *pāñcarātri*ka śāstra into an obscure and impenetrable hodgepodge. The rape of the *Bharadvaja-samhita* generates the unwanted pregnancy of compounded deviations and unrealistic ultimatums. But, to add insult to injury, despite all their epistemic and ethical indiscretions, the śāstra-rapists pompously sit on the so-called "ISKCON India Scholars Board."

The *Bharadvaja-samhita* Rapists Appointed as Scriptural Authorities

In normal circumstances one would expect those guilty of heretical deviations (such as the authors of the book "Vaisnava-diksa according to Narada Pancaratra") to be at least formally censored and reprimanded; and preferably removed from any official post. But in this case the two misled and misleading śāstra-rapists are still members of the "ISKCON India Scholars Board," as if immaculately innocent.²¹ It's like keeping convicted pedophiles in charge of the *Child Protection Office*.

Readers may wonder: how could this be possible? How were the neo-*smārtas* able to capture and maintain such positions, despite their demonstrable (and demonstrated) disloyalty to śāstra, to Gaudiya-vaisnavism and to Srila Prabhupada? I have my own answers, but I prefer to let readers come to their own conclusions.

Neo-*smārtas*: Unwilling to Learn

Madana-mohana Dāsa, a loyal and skilled Gaudiya-vaisnava scholar, produced an extensive refutation of the neo-*smārtas*' mishandling of the *Bharadvaja-samhita*: "Guru: The Principle, Not the Body" a response to "Vaiṣṇava-dīkṣā according to Nārada-Pañcarātra: Can a Female Devotee be a dīkṣā-guru?"²² If you are open to understand the text *as it is*, you will enjoy his detailed explanations. He patiently demonstrates why their conjectures are false and untenable. Unfortunately (but not

²¹ <https://iisb.co.in/members/>

²² From an electronic format, you can access for free the book "[Guru: The Principle, Not the Body](#)" [here](#). Otherwise, you can go here: https://vaishnaviministry.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Guru_-_The_Principle_Not_the_Body_by_Madana-mohana_Da.sa_2020.pdf - A long URL to type, but it's worth it.

unexpectedly) the neo-*smārta* authors and their supporters didn't show any willingness to be corrected or instructed.

I want to conclude this section with something refreshing and pure, diametrically opposed to the neo-*smārta* speculations. I want to mention the words of the Founder-*Ācārya* in *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*; a quote so radiant and clear (and perfectly in line with the *Bharadvaja-samhita*) that can illuminate our consciousness as direct sunlight: "A serious person would accept Caitanya Mahāprabhu's instruction that anyone conversant with the science of Kṛṣṇa must be accepted as the spiritual master, regardless of his social position . . . In all *śāstras* the chief qualification of a bona fide spiritual master is that he be conversant in the science of Kṛṣṇa." (TLC, Chapter 31)

The sentence "In all *śāstras*," of course, includes the *Bharadvaja-samhita*.

Quote Anything to Prevent VDGs - But Not Gopala Bhatta Goswami!



According to Srila Prabhupada: "His Holiness Srila Gopala Bhatta Goswami was the originator of Vaisnava Smṛti in our Gaudiya Sampradaya." (Letter to Sri Biswambhar Goswami, 25 Dec 1956) I find interesting - and revealing - that neo-*smārtas* quote all sorts of (mistranslated and misinterpreted) *smṛti* references to prevent Vaisnavis from becoming *diksa-gurus*, but "forget" to quote the *Sat-kriya-sara-dipika* of Srila Gopala Bhatta Goswami, a treatise on *samskaras* for Gaudiya Vaisnavas.

In the introduction Gopala Bhatta Goswami writes, regarding atonement: "What is that atonement? One should again accept name and mantra from one's own spiritual master. If the guru is not present (left his body), one should accept from the guru's wife, son or godbrother or from any other pure devotee having similar qualities." The Sanskrit is very clear, listing the people from whom to take initiation in order of preference and precedence: "if the guru is not present, then retake initiation from his wife, if she is not available, then from his son, if he is not there, then from his godbrother, etc." - the wife of the guru being the first choice. Enough said.

It Finally Sank In: It's the Ritual, Stupid!

For all these years something perplexed me about the neo-*smārtas* position on women's guruship. The neo-*smārtas* have been vehemently opposing women from initiating disciples; that is, from giving names and handing *japas* (not truly overwhelming tasks in themselves); but neo-*smārtas* accepted, even if grudgingly, that women could be *sikṣa-gurus*.

I found their stand odd. They must have heard a million times quotes such as this one: "***Śikṣā-guru* becomes *dikṣā-guru* . . . guru means one who knows the science of Kṛṣṇa and teaches properly. That's all.**" (Conversation, Bhuvaneshvara, 31 Jan 1977) I would understand (which doesn't mean that "I would accept" or "I would agree") someone wishing to keep women in radically inferior roles and positions. I can understand going full-ISIS: no education for girls, absolute submission to husbands, no public voice, no public role, etc. That approach is outrageous, but at least it's coherent with the worldview of certain individuals and groups. Such people couldn't even conceive an elevated status such as *sikṣa-guru* for a woman. Their stand, although creepy, is at least clear, congruous with their stand on gender roles. But the neo-*smārtas* appear inconsistent: "Women as *dikṣa-gurus*? No, never - on our dead bodies! Women as *sikṣa-gurus*? Hmm... OK." It doesn't make sense.

And so, I kept perceiving this strange incoherence within the neo-*smārta* camp, this peculiar cognitive dissonance. They know very well that the *sikṣa-* and *dikṣa-gurus* are, in one sense, identical, but for women they accept one (albeit reluctantly) and reject the other. Puzzling.

I mean, Srila Prabhupada had been teaching about this topic even before coming to the West: "The spiritual Master is bifurcated into two plenary facts called by the names of initiator spiritual master and instructor spiritual master. Both of them are one and identical because both of them are phenomenal manifestations of the Supreme Truth." (*Back to Godhead* magazine, 1960, vol 3, part 16) In fact, Srila Prabhupada also explains that an artificial differentiation is offensive: "There is no difference between the shelter-giving Supreme Lord and the initiating and instructing spiritual masters. If one foolishly discriminates between them, he commits an offense in the discharge of devotional service." (Cc Madhya, 1.47, purport)

Neo-*smārtas* heard the concept many times, and they accept that a woman can be an "instructor spiritual master" (in fact at every opportunity they repeat the straight-

faced lie that when Srila Prabhupada referred to women becoming spiritual masters, he was only talking about becoming *siksa-gurus*). And so I could not reconcile their ambiguous stand: "Women *siksa-gurus*? OK, passable... tolerable... The same *siksa-guru* women giving a *japa* and a name? No way! Maha-heresy!" It doesn't add up. It's irrational. Perhaps, since Srila Prabhupada said so many times that both men and women can and should become gurus, the neo-*smārtas* are willing to settle for the "lesser of two evils"? But it still doesn't make sense: why official and qualified *siksa-gurus* should be prevented from initiating their students?

Perhaps women are unable to find suitable Sanskrit names for their disciples? Visualize the scene: "So, Bhaktin Mary, your new, spiritual name shall be... err... let's see... M... M... M... I mean... hmm... M... M... M... No, sorry, I can't find any name starting with 'M' - better you go and get initiated by a male guru." Hardly conceivable.

Or perhaps women don't know where to get *japas*? But women as a class have generally been known as adroit at shopping. Besides, getting the *japa* is the job of the disciple, not the guru. These "explanations" don't explain anything. And so, the gnawing conundrum remained up to very recently, when it finally dawned on me, and I told myself:

It's the ritual, stupid!

We are dealing with neo-*smārtas*, who suffer from deep-rooted psychological blockages about sacramental procedures, an innate penchant for giving exaggerate importance to ritualistic ceremonies. They have a fetishistic inclination to elevate liturgic formalities to fanciful, lofty heights. Some of them might have carried this conditioning for lifetimes. When they somehow join ISKCON, it stays with them.



Formal ritualistic procedures, fire *yajnas*, the muttering of arcane incantations... in previous lives these esoteric techniques have set them apart from everyone else. It was their trademark and copyright, their claim to social prestige and even economic privilege. Only they could do those things! The monopoly on rituals had



kept them above powerful rulers and wealthy merchants, who had to obediently sit around the fire while they - the highest caste, the chosen people, the *panditas* and *purohitas* - performed elaborate, esoteric rites. In their previous lives, even kings weren't allowed to do what they could do, and now they are asked to share this exclusive podium, this special pedestal, this loftiest of social ranks with... *women?!?*

What profanation! What humiliation! What disgrace!

Anathema! Abomination! Blasphemy!

Today's neo-*smārtas* display this subconscious ego baggage. They may be born as *mlecchas*, but their pride didn't get washed away in the most recent wombs. Such *samskaras* - both as psychic impressions and as the elitist arrogation of *samskara* performances - clash with whatever Gaudiya-vaisnavism they might have assimilated.

It's like a voracious tapeworm that keeps them always hungry for distinction. And so the neo-*smārtas* begrudgingly settle on a compromised but still discriminatory position: "OK, women can teach, which (thank God!) doesn't involve complex ritualistic formalities, but let them not infringe on the sacred ritual! They shouldn't trespass on that hallowed realm! Let women not trample on the vestigial echoes of our previous exceptionality, on the reverberations of our lost glory, on our lingering mystical mojo."

The neo-*smārtas* are willing to settle: "OK, women can advise and instruct their foolish, feminist followers (grr...), BUT LET THEM BE FOREVER BANNED FROM HANDING OUT JAPAS AND GIVING NAMES DURING A FIRE-SACRIFICE!" The neo-*smārtas* are ready to tear ISKCON apart to prevent such sacrilege from happening. They won't give up the male monopoly of the ritual; the ghosts of caste consciousness won't allow it.

If Srila Prabhupada Didn't Want VDGs, He Would Have Clearly Said It



Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu once told a story to illustrate that when Srila Prabhupada wanted devotees to understand a point, he would stress it again and again, thoroughly and forcefully. Mayapur, Srila Prabhupada's room; devotees are visiting from all over the world. They share photos of their temples and outreach programs. One photo shows a drama performed in the temple room, with the actors giving their backs to the Deities. Srila Prabhupada explains the mistake; the performers should *face* the Deities. To every devotee who subsequently enters the room Srila Prabhupada shows the photo and ask something like, "What do you see, what do you notice?" They say something like, "Very nice; beautiful drama." Srila Prabhupada keeps repeating: we should not perform dramas with our backs to the Deities.

Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu was making the point in connection with the ritvik theory: if Srila Prabhupada wanted to introduce something completely new, something completely different from what he had been speaking for years, different than what he had written in the books, he would have made sure to repeat it again and again, so as not to leave any shadow of doubt in the mind of devotees.

The same applies to VDG. If Srila Prabhupada wanted to terminate a Gaudiya-vaisnava tradition going on for centuries, he would have clearly spelled it out. If Srila Prabhupada - as the neo-*smārtas* contend - didn't want women to initiate disciples, he would have repeated it again and again and made it crystal clear (as he made clear, for instance, that he didn't want women to take *sannyasa*). He would have distinctly stated something like: "*Diksa-guru* is for men; women can only be *siksa-gurus*. Men can initiate disciples, whereas women can only offer instruction."

Srila Prabhupada spoke so much about the concept of guru! In *Vanipedia.org* we find 11,431 entries for 'guru'; 12,020 for 'spiritual master'; 1,623 for 'initiation'; 1,700 for 'initiated'; 246 for '*diksa*'; 230 for '*siksa*'; we also encounter hundreds of entries for related words ('spiritual masters,' 'gurus,' 'initiating,' 'initiator,' etc.). But we cannot find even one sentence prohibiting women from initiating disciples.



Advaita Acarya and Sita Thakurani at the "Sitanath Advaita Mandir," in Nabadwip.

Neo-*smārtas* have been frantic, panicky about this fact; that's why, in their frustration and dejection they became afflicted with cognitive delusions such as the "Suniti Hallucination." If Srila Prabhupada didn't want Vaisnavi *diksa-gurus* in ISKCON he could have said it in hundreds and thousands of occasions. He never did. Just the opposite: when the topic came up (admittedly not very often) he clearly confirmed that they could: **"It is not that woman cannot be *ācārya*."** (Conversation, San Diego, 29 June 1972) His stand was perfectly consistent with the Gaudiya tradition. Sita Thakurani, the wife of

Advaita Acarya, was probably the first Vaisnavi *diksa-guru* in Gaudiya-vaisnavism.

What Part of "All of My Disciples" Don't They Understand?

Diametrically opposed to prohibiting women from becoming initiating spiritual masters, Srila Prabhupada kept expressing the same encompassing vision, again and again:

"One who is now the disciple is the next spiritual master." (SB 2.9.43, purport)

"Maybe by 1975, all of my disciples will be allowed to initiate." (Letter to Hamsaduta, 3 Jan 1969)

"These students, who are initiated from me, all of them will act as I am doing . . . all these disciples which I am making, initiating, they are being trained to become future spiritual masters." (Room Conversation, Detroit, 18 July 1971)

"Every student is expected to become Acarya . . . I want to see my disciples become bona fide Spiritual Master." (Letter to Tusta Krsna, 2 Dec 1975)

Neo-*smārtas*, demonstrating infidelity and poor discernment, subliminally insert words dictated by prejudice - words that were never spoken. And so they read the above quotes as follows (invented inclusions in all caps):

"One who is now the MALE disciple is the next spiritual master. THIS DOESN'T APPLY TO FEMALE DISCIPLES."

"Maybe by 1975, all of my MALE disciples will be allowed to initiate."

"These MALE students, who are initiated from me, all of them, BUT THE MALE ONLY, will act as I am doing . . . all these MALE disciples which I am making, initiating, they, THE MALE DISCIPLES, are being trained to become future spiritual masters."

"Every MALE student is expected to become Acarya . . . I want to see my MALE disciples become bona fide Spiritual Master."



You can be sure that if Prabhupada wanted only male *diksa-gurus* he would have said that clearly, again and again - or at least just once! Some readers may ask, "But, following the same logic, if he had wanted women *diksa-guru*, wouldn't he say that again and again?" Two quick answers to that:

1. That's exactly what he did by using expressions such as **"all of my disciples"** and **"all these disciples."** *All* means *all* (duh); unless we impose our bias and project restrictions that do not exist, literarily, grammatically, or contextually. There are also more quotes expressing the same inclusive spirit. Here I am adding just a few:

"I wish that in my absence all my disciples become the bona fide spiritual master." (Letter to Madhusudana, 2 Nov 1967)

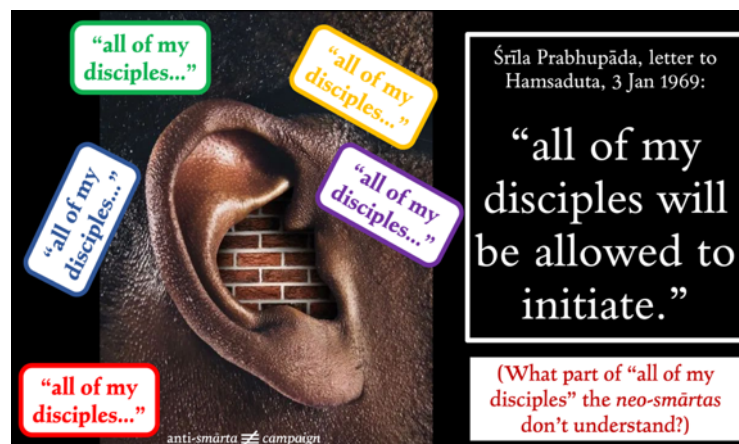
"I hope that all of you, men, women, boys and girls, become spiritual master." (Vyasa-puja Address, London, 22 Aug 1973)

“All of our students will have to become guru.” (Letter to Alanatha, 10 Nov 1975)

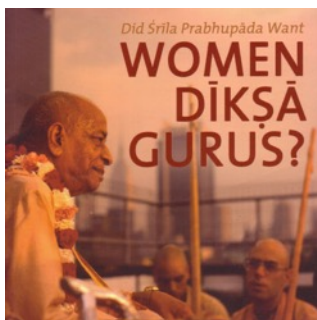
(By the way, these quotes are not shared to convince the neo-*smārtas*; they will argue till they are blue in the face and beyond - these references are for honest readers, those who wish to learn about the plan of the Founder-*Ācārya* - as it is.)

2. There wasn't any need to repeat again and again what had been the default setting in our *sampradāya* for centuries, that women could and did initiate disciples. No *ācārya* in Gaudiya-vaisnavism ever spoke against the principle; and Srila Prabhupada didn't have to emphasize a concept that wasn't challenged till the inauspicious intrusion of the neo-*smārtas*. It's only these *apa-apasampradāyis* that doubt the tradition (and the *siddhānta*) and try to disrupt and distort the sacred process of *dikṣa*.

The only way to dismiss the "all-of-my-disciples" category of quotes, is to concoct that women aren't full-fledged disciples, that they are... I don't know... some sort of surrogate students or shadow-disciples; some kind of embryonic trainees and quasi-*śiṣyas*. In any case, essentially phantom followers. Otherwise, we must do what's unthinkable for neo-*smārtas*: embrace the words of the Founder-*Ācārya* at face value.



Further Reading

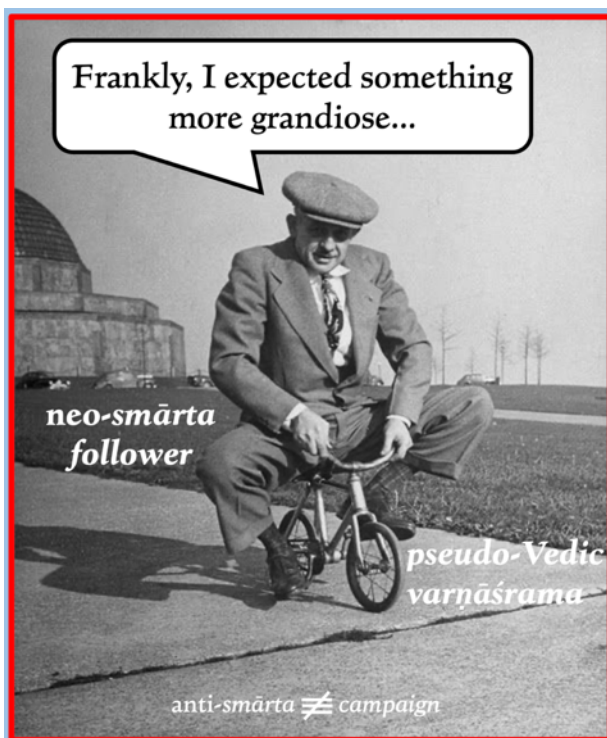


Readers interested in the subject of women *dikṣa-gurus* are invited to read the [book](#) "Did Srila Prabhupada Want Women Dikṣa Gurus?"²³ a thorough debunking of anti-VDG arguments (thanks to the neo-*smārtas* for supplying some of the most preposterous arguments). It includes rational explanations by multiple ISKCON leaders conclusively proving that, yes, Srila Prabhupada wanted women *dikṣa-gurus* and that he never spoke or wrote anything against the idea.

²³ You can download it for free at: <https://wordpress.com/post/realvarnasrama.wordpress.com/222>

Neo-smārta Varṇāśrama, Same as Āsura-varṇāśrama?

Varnasrama is the divine system given by God so that human beings can prosper in this world while advancing toward ultimate liberation. Srila Prabhupada instructed his leaders: "You have to establish *varṇāśrama*" (Morning Walk, Mayapur, 5 Feb 1976), but he never wanted to institute the Vedic caste system based on birth. In its pure form *varṇāśrama* constitutes a desirable model for civilized and progressive living, but, as everything within this material world, our ideas of *varṇāśrama* come in three main flavors, according to the *gunas*, the three influences of material nature.



Śrīla Prabhupāda,
Cc Madhya, 6.178,
purport:

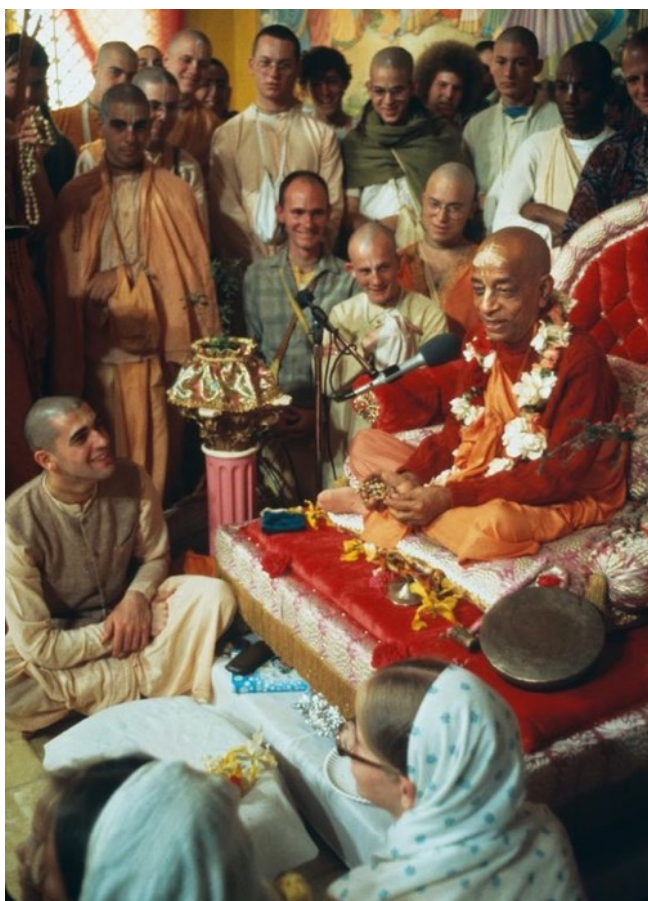
“Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu advises that we not worry about the Vedic system of *varṇāśrama-dharma*.”

Basically, you can recognize tamasic concepts and practices (*varṇāśrama* in the mode of ignorance) by their being narrow-minded, unrealistic, and blindly dismissing time, place, and circumstances. When in *tamas*, we try to indiscriminately impose outdated and counterproductive anachronisms (child marriage, polygamy, etc.). We may discard the sacred, underlying principles and instead worship superfluous minutiae. Our social arrangements create violence, exploitation, and oppression - engendering oceans of unnecessary pain. Our obscurantist theories generate more problems than they solve. *Tamas* twists our perception of reality, forcing us to live in a fantasy land shaped by nightmares. We promote an insular conception of

varṇāśrama, regardless of its applicability and relevance. In other words, we are stuck in the past - another clear sign of *tamas*.²⁴

When in *rajo-guna*, passion, we take the bodily divisions as central and essential; as Lord Krishna says in the *Bhagavad-gita* (18.21) **“That knowledge by which one sees that in every different body there is a different type of living entity you should understand to be in the mode of passion.”** The external, temporary distinctions appear to us as more real, more vivid, more relevant than people’s inner identities. *Rajas* stimulates our competitive spirit, our obsession with hierarchies and control; and so we attempt to dominate the weaker sections for our own gain and aggrandizement. Since passion fuels egotism, we become entrenched in self-importance and selfishness. We prioritize protecting the privileges of our rank, our gender, and our leverage in the system (being *brāhmaṇa*, male, rich, etc.), instead of helping others advance. We see the empowering of others as a suicidal policy.

When in *sattva-guna*, goodness, we envision a *varṇāśrama* that’s realistic and inclusive. The primary spirit is unity in diversity; as Lord Krishna says in *Bhagavad-gita* (18.20): **“That knowledge by which one undivided spiritual nature is seen in all living entities, though they are divided into innumerable forms, you should understand to be in the mode of goodness.”** We honor the natural divisions of society, recognizing the need for sane social hierarchy, but our overall vision is one of spiritual egalitarianism, stressing the soul and its progressive journey. In *sattva*, because of being clear-headed, we appreciate and obey the teachings of the *ācāryas*, without trying to



²⁴ These comments shouldn't be misinterpreted as trying to discourage devotees from going to live on farms or in villages (I live in a village, by the way). Srila Prabhupada's mission is not restricted to urban or to rural environments; his vision is all-encompassing. Here I am not interested to promote one over the other (although, other factors being same, the advantages of a natural environment are undeniable). One can adopt tamasic, rajasic or sattvic *varṇāśrama* lifestyles in any place. Here I am stressing how the gunas flavor our social conceptions, our approaches to *varṇāśrama* - regardless of one's domicile.

squeeze artificial meanings out of their instructions. We understand and maintain principles, but are flexible with details, understanding that this world undergoes constant socio-economic, cultural, and technological transformation. We avoid being recklessly sectarian. We firmly reject the *āśura-varṇāśrama*, the hereditary and birth-dependent caste system: "The *ācāryas* who advocate the *daiva-varṇāśrama* (the social order of *cātur-varṇyam* mentioned in the *Bhagavad-gītā*) do not accept the proposition of *āśura-varṇāśrama*, which maintains that the social order of *varṇa* is indicated by birth." (Cc Madhya, 3.6, purport) Genuine *daiva-varṇāśrama* is infused with brahminical liberality and devotional compassion, and it encourages all individuals, men and women alike, to grow and reach their full potential.

Srila Prabhupada explains: "Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself has enumerated the basic principles of a caste system that is real and universal. The four social orders (intellectual, administrative, mercantile, and laborer) are set by Him according to the qualities these persons have acquired through their actions under the modes of nature . . . He is not the maker of a tyrannical and unnatural caste system in which the faithless dictate one's position according to one's birth. Rather, He is the maker of a caste system that is applicable universally, is voluntary and natural, and is based on one's qualities and abilities." (*Message of Godhead*, Chapter 2, "Karma-yoga") To the extent that neo-*smārtas* push "a tyrannical and unnatural caste system," their idea of *varṇāśrama* remains indistinguishable from *āśura-varṇāśrama*.



Neo-smārta Varṇāśrama

For children, sliding down the stairs in a laundry basket may feel electrifying, but their cheerful play often ends up in bruises and tears. Similarly, the neo-*smārtas* may feel thrilled by flirting with "material *dharmāśāstra*" and social strictures never intended for Gaudiyas, but their unauthorized experiments will end in disaster. Children sliding down the stairs in a plastic basket may see themselves as daring explorers and fearless adventurers (while they are only kids playing at home); similarly, neo-*smārtas* may visualize themselves as great Vedic heroes and sublime social reformers, but in fact they are simply promoters of tamasic sociological aberrations. Lord Caitanya's movement doesn't require their childish fantasies and their pseudo-Vedic daydreams.

"One Cannot Suddenly Change a Community's Social Customs."

The key word here (a sentence from the purport to Cc Adi, 7.31-32), is "suddenly." Srila Prabhupada certainly wanted that his disciples systematical uplift their habits and mentality: "[P]lease train up all these boys and girls in the philosophy and brahminical culture and they will become useful tools in the hands of Lord Krishna for saving all the fallen souls in this age." (Letter to Jagadisa, 27 March 1972)

The *sankirtana* movement needs ladies and gentlemen who can properly represent, through proper behavior and right precepts, the teachings of the *sampradāya*. Dirty, sinful people can't represent the Cleanest, the Purest. Srila Prabhupada wanted his followers to become aligned with Vedic principles: "all my disciples follow the ethics, behavior and virtues according to Vedic rules." (Conversation, Bombay, 7 Nov 1970) Of course, his idea of "Vedic rules" wasn't calcified or fossilized: "In India... you have no experience, but . . . a *sannyāsī* cannot come in touch with a woman. A woman must stand at least ten yards away from the *sannyāsī*. That is the regulation . . . They should offer obeisances at least ten yards away. So now I am moving amongst the women. But what can be done? This is a different country. If I say that, 'You women, you go away. You cannot come here,' then where is my preaching? If I say that 'You cannot mix with us,' then where is my preaching? The woman and man, they are equally important in the respect of spiritual realization." (Lecture on SB 1.1.10, London, 20 July 1972)



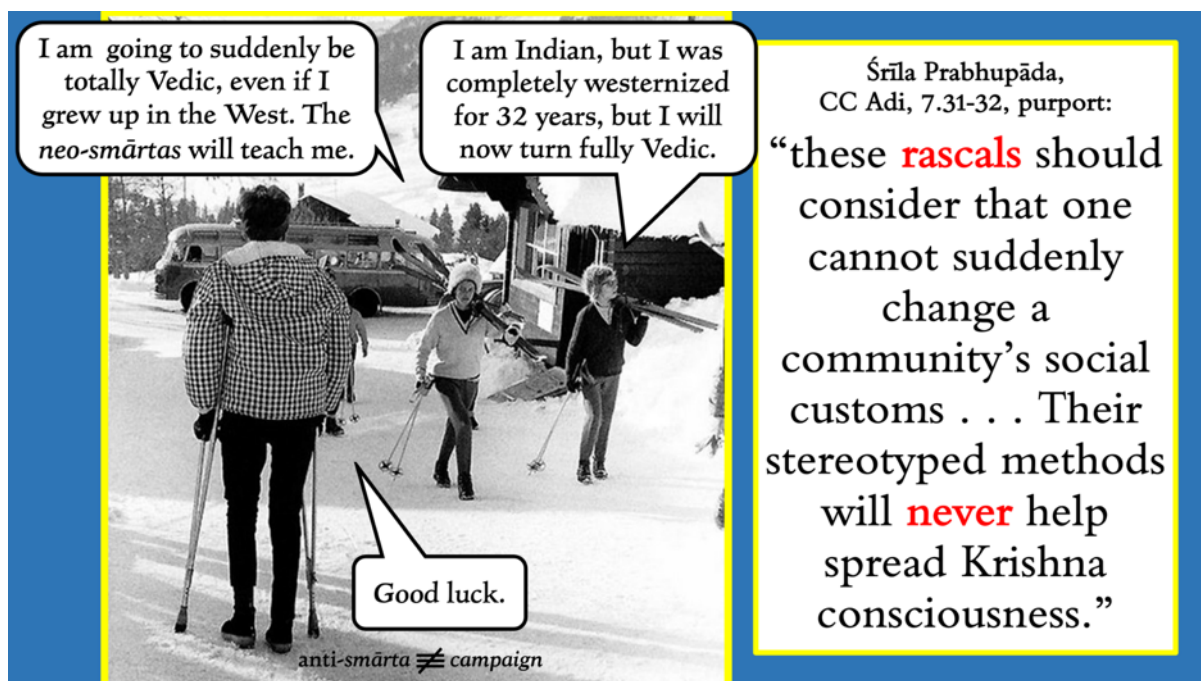
Śrīla Prabhupāda,
Conversation, Seattle, 24 Sept 1968"

"Girls should not be taken as inferior . . . the girls who come, you should treat them nicely . . . anyone who is coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, man or woman, boys or girls, they are welcome. They are very fortunate . . .

everyone shall treat others as 'my master.' This is the Vaiṣṇava system."

The difference between Srila Prabhupada's "Vedic rules" and the neo-*smārtas'* pseudo-Vedic rules is like the difference between a *sampradāya* and an *apa-sampradāya*. Day and night. *Veda* means knowledge; Vedic means based on knowledge; knowledge implies a realistic estimate of the capacity of different individuals for godly behavior and awareness of the progressive, gradual steps required for their

purification. The truly Vedic approach to social upliftment doesn't involve irresponsibly imposing impractical, anachronistic, and draconian prohibitions. Artificial, immature, neurotic conceptions of Vedic life will only repel potential devotees and tyrannize the existing ones, making their life miserable and pushing them away from ISKCON.



One More Neo-*smārta* Trickery: Falsely Claiming Monopoly on "Traditionalism"

Neo-*smārtas* have plenty of tools in their "bag of tricks," in their arsenal of sophistry and false arguments. One of these ruses is their "appeal to tradition." They say, "We are the traditionalists, the



defenders of true *dharma*, of *sāstric* standards, blah, blah, blah." As they are an *apa-sampradāya*, what they are in fact defending is a bunch of toxic baloney; but some sentimental, innocent devotees feel attracted by anything branded as "traditional." They feel intimidated, afraid of being accused of being against tradition.

Krishna consciousness, of course, being *sanatana-dharma* (the eternal occupation of the soul) is, in one sense, the apex and essence of traditionalism (you can't get more traditional than *eternity*); but not all "traditional" habits, norms and conventions are conducive to *bhakti*. Some are, others are not. First, we need to understand that something "traditional" is simply something that has been going on for a long time. It's a neutral term. Here is the primary definition of "traditional" in the *Britannica Dictionary*: "based on a way of thinking, behaving, or doing something that has been used by the people in a particular group, family, society, etc., for a long time."



"Infanticide in the Ganges," engraving, early 19th century

There is nothing indicating that such traditions are necessarily good or beneficial. In some countries, for instance, it's "traditional" to eat certain animals on specific religious festivals. A Pew Research study revealed that in India, just in the ten years between 2009 and 2019, at least nine million baby girls were killed (you can check "Female infanticide in India," on Wikipedia.). That's 2,464 female babies killed every day - more than one hundred every hour. If you have been reading this section for one minute, chances are that during this time one or two baby girls have been murdered. So, we can conclude that in India female infanticide is pretty "traditional." (As an aside, you may want to explore if any psychological correlation may exist between the massacre of female infants and the neo-*smārtas'* attitudes towards Vaisnavis. I leave that to you.) So, "traditional" doesn't necessarily mean "good."

The second important consideration is: what tradition are we talking about? Within Hinduism - and even within Vaisnavism - there are plenty of traditions that are incompatible with or even antithetical to Gaudiya-vaisnavism. Even within the groups claiming connection to Lord Caitanya there are many deviant *apa-sampradāyas* that have built their traditions on heterodoxy.

Third: our tradition is one of innovation. Loyal Gaudiyas are strict on "principles" but don't venerate discardable details. Some traditions should be maintained; other peacefully jettisoned. Gaudiyas adapt and adopt whatever is favorable to *bhakti*. Potatoes, tomatoes, and chilies, for instance, are not originally from India (Gaudiya

Vaisnava cooks are respectfully requested to kindly adopt chilies in moderation). Harmonium is not an Indian instrument, but it was successfully incorporated within Gaudiya culture. The true spirit of the Gaudiyas is to boldly look forward and, armed with *yukta-vairagya*, work to "reclaim" as many souls and as much material energy as possible



for the service of Mahaprabhu. We should not get stuck in traditional customs that may have served precious purposes in the past but that today represent vicious obstacles, nostalgic cultural relics that can only harm the *sankirtana* movement. Let's imbibe the *sutra*-like, gemlike words of the Founder-*Ācārya* in *Caitanya-caritamrita*, *Adi-lila* 7.28: "The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is not stereotyped or stagnant."

When someone tells you that something is "traditional," please ask yourself:

1. Is this tradition beneficial or is it simply a violent, demoniac custom?
2. Is it something that was useful in the past, in a completely different social and cultural environment, but deleterious today?
3. What *tradition* does this *traditional* thing belongs to? Is it compatible with Mahaprabhu's teachings?

neo-smartā wives take a selfie

My Prabhu says that the traditional way is ALWAYS the best way.

My Prabhu says the same! I can't wait to post this photo on Instagrāmya-kathā

anti-smārta ~~is~~ campaign

Śrīla Prabhupāda,
SB 1.5.16, purport:

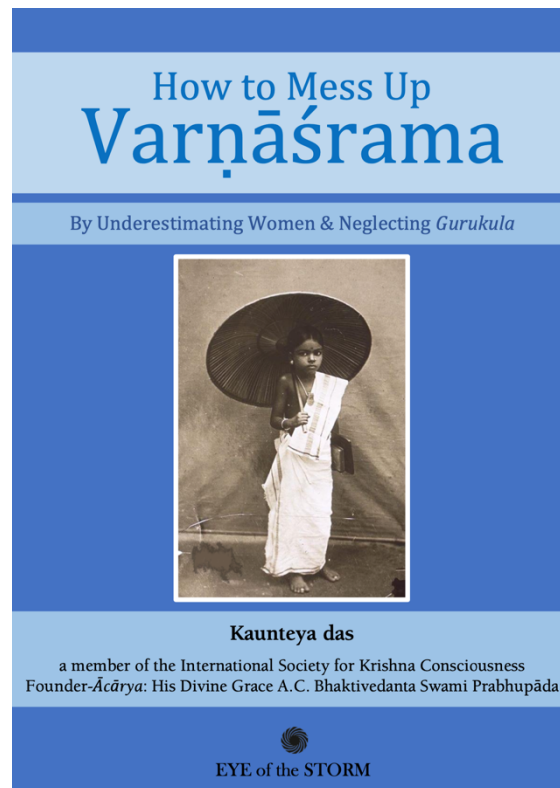
“The expert devotees also can discover novel ways and means to convert the nondevotees in terms of particular time and circumstance. Devotional service is dynamic activity.”

4. Is it something Srila Prabhupada and the *ācāryas* recommended or is it simply a sentimental regurgitation from a bygone era?
5. Is it a tradition of Gaudiya-vaisnavism or of a condemned *apa-sampradāya*?
6. Is it a principle or a detail?
7. Does this tradition helps or harms the spirit of innovation that *traditionally* pervades and directs our *sampradāya*?
8. Is it something that facilitates or damages the spreading of Krishna consciousness?

After this analysis you might want to accept and assimilate the traditional element or serenely discard it.

Further Reading

This book doesn't delve too deeply into the topic of *varṇāśrama* in ISKCON. Readers interested in the subject are encouraged to download the [free book](#) "How to Mess Up Varṇāśrama - By Underestimating Women & Neglecting Gurukula."²⁵



²⁵ <https://realvarnasrama.wordpress.com/2021/05/15/how-to-mess-up-varnasrama-by-underestimating-women-neglecting-gurukula-free-book/>

Srila Prabhupada: Lenient with Sensual Weaknesses, Strict with Philosophical Deviations

When devotees slipped into sensual weaknesses, Srila Prabhupada encouraged them to continue their spiritual efforts, despite their present debilitated condition, and to remain active in ISKCON. For instance, the day he received news that one of his main leaders had given up his *sannyāsa*, he wrote a famous *Bhagavatam* purport, connecting the story of the elephant Gajendra fighting against the crocodile with the need for situating oneself in a fitting social and psycho-emotional situation: "For preaching we give young boys *sannyāsa*, but actually it is being experienced that they are not fit for *sannyāsa* . . . If *sannyāsa* is not suitable, one may enter the *gṛhastha-āśrama* and fight *māyā* with great strength. But one should not give up the fighting and go away." (SB 8.2.30, purport)



He wanted that devotees, even if... shaky on sense control, fully participate in the *sankirtana* movement, adjusting their situation to become more and more stable. A devotee aptly pointed out: "The problem with philosophical impurities in a pious person is that philosophical impurities are harder to get rid of. If someone falls down [on the sensual level], it doesn't make an *apa-sampradāya*. But if someone gives a different philosophy, even if they are pukka, that's an *apa-siddhanta*." In the matter of philosophical deviancy, Srila Prabhupada showed no tolerance or flexibility, to the point, for instance, of throwing out of ISKCON dear disciples such as Brahmananda, Gargamuni, and Visnujana Swamis for promoting ideas tainted with *Māyāvāda*.

The *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, Chapter 31, "A Threat Against ISKCON," tells what happened. During the 1970 Janmastami festival in New Vrindavana, "Four of the newly initiated *sannyāsīs* had arrived . . . and were teaching a strange philosophy . . . The *sannyāsīs* were blaming themselves and other disciples for not realizing that *Prabhupāda* was actually *Kṛṣṇa*! When Prabhupāda heard this, he said, 'That is why I did not go. I knew this would happen. This is impersonalism' . . . If one says that the *guru* is God, or if the *guru* himself says that he is God, that is Māyāvāda philosophy . . . The Māyāvāda philosophy was a subtle and insidious poison . . . Certain disciples had been contaminated by the poisonous philosophy from India."

To the devotees who were with him in Japan, "Prabhupāda asked what they thought should be done . . . they suggested that anyone teaching Māyāvāda philosophy should not be allowed to stay within ISKCON." The four *sannyāsīs* were thus expelled from the Society and for a time wandered as disenfranchised, excommunicated individuals.²⁶

Some readers may object, "But preaching Māyāvāda is a big aberration! How can you compare it with what the neo-*smārtas* are doing?" My reply: "The neo-*smārtas* are even worse; they peddle plenty of social nonsense, and, *on top of that* they also spread Māyāvādi ideas."

The "ISKCON India Scholars Board" Preaches *Māyāvāda*

In their recent paper, "Śrīla Prabhupāda's Authority in his Books and Other Contexts," the "ISKCON India Scholars Board" does the same thing as the four *sannyāsīs* did more than 50 years ago, but with a little more finesse than when young Brahmananda Swami in a heated moment shouted "Srla Prabhupada is God!"

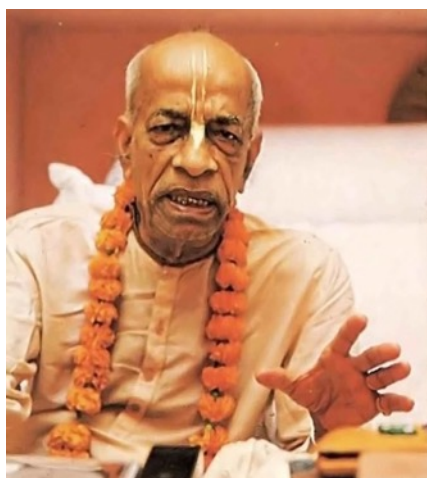
At that time, the Founder-*Ācārya* dealt with the heresy promptly and decisively. Sureshvara Dasa (ACBSP) reports in his [article](#) "Fictional Prabhupadas"²⁷: "Prabhupada thundered his reply: 'They have committed the greatest offense. There is only one thing worse than underestimating the guru – overestimating the guru.'

²⁶ After repenting, the four *sannyāsīs* were reintegrated in ISKCON; you can find more details on the whole story in the book *Radha Damodara Vilasa - Vol. 1*, by Vaiyasaki Das.

²⁷ <https://btg.krishna.com/fictional-prabhupadas/> - Vol. 1, *Eleventh Wave* "New Vrindavan Shakedown"; from an interview with Madhudvisha Dasa.

They have said I am God. Therefore, if I am God, they also can become God. This is impersonalism."

In a completely bizarre and misguided way, the "Scholars Board" attempted to "glorify" Srila Prabhupada by comparing him with Krishna (?!). This is what they wrote: "Criticising Śrīla Prabhupāda for alleged mistakes is non-different from criticizing Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself." In other words, if someone point out, say, that something Srila Prabhupada heard from his professors at *Scottish Church College* wasn't accurate, it's like blaspheming God. They attribute God's infallibility to Srila Prabhupada. If this is not Māyāvāda, you tell me what is.



But the "Scholars Board" doesn't stop there: "[A] liberated soul's words and actions can never be classified as defective, because being self-realized or having attained the perfection of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, there can be no defects in one just as there can be no defects in Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the all-perfect Supreme Personality of Godhead." Again, they present Srila Prabhupada as being as infallible as Krishna. Srila Prabhupada would be furious to hear this. He would be fuming.

The "Scholars" are not finished; in the same paper they keep hammering the same impersonalist drivel. They don't only compare Srila Prabhupada to Krishna; they also equate him to other *Viṣṇu-tattva* forms of God: "There can be no defects in the body or words of a pure devotee . . . Throughout the *Rāmāyaṇa*, we find Śrī Rāma and Śrī Lakṣmaṇa behaving like humans and even exhibiting the defects of human beings." In other word, Srila Prabhupada, according to them, was on the functional level of a *Viṣṇu-tattva*, and his body had "no defects." His body was presumably *sat-cit-ananda vigraha*; every toothache, headache, and the many other ailments Srila Prabhupada had to endure from his physical body, was just... what? A divine drama? Among the twelve members in the "Scholars Board," who conjointly signed the paper, no one objected to this rubbish?

Srila Prabhupada clearly explains: "if one is overestimated, glorification is just another form of blasphemy." (Cc Madhya, 10.182, purport)

But the paper continues to depersonalize and deify the Founder-*Ācārya*. They write: "even if a devotee appears to be suffering from bodily or mental distress, that is only an appearance, not the reality." According to these "Scholars" he didn't feel the cold

of the winter, the biting of mosquitoes, the fatigue of travelling, the needles of the doctors, the scalpel of the surgeon, or the mental agony of seeing his ISKCON under attack by all sorts of enemies. What about his painful weeks on the Jaladuta? He wrote in his diary: "Rain, seasickness, dizziness, headache, no appetite, vomiting." But according to the neo-*smārtas* he didn't feel anything; he just wrote for show. And what about the two heart attacks he suffered on that ship? Nothing, simply a theatrical performance. In other words, the neo-*smārtas* dismiss the hardships and anxieties Srila



Prabhupada's underwent as if they were the mechanized deeds of an impassive, insentient robot. In this way, they confiscate from Srila Prabhupada the credit for all the rigors and austerities he underwent. All the pain he endured for saving us was "only an appearance." Srila Prabhupada wrote: **"they [the disciples] must be very, very careful not to commit any sinful acts or otherwise I shall have to suffer as their spiritual master."** (Letter to Sri Govinda, 27 Dec 1972) The "Scholars Board" turn *guru-puja* into idol worship, curdling *guru-bhakti* into idolatry. The person of the guru dissolves, and an artificial, robotic, and disembodied idea of "perfection" takes his place. Srila Prabhupada disappears as a person. What remains is a soulless, impersonal, and impermeable automaton. This is typical of neo-*smārtas*: they take the body as the self, and, in dealing with the Founder-*Ācārya*, artificially elevate *his physical body* to a speculative, Māyāvādi apotheosis.

Thus, in a more sophisticated way, the "ISKCON India Scholars Board" teaches the same Māyāvāda precepts as the four *sannyasis* did in 1970. But with one crucial difference: those four devotees had been initiated for maximum four years, and their indiscretions were mostly due to immaturity and *śāstric* ignorance. However, some members of the "Board" had been initiated for more than forty years. We can't

whitewash or explain away their ideological recklessness as a lack of seniority or experience. No, they are really very, very bad at understanding the philosophy of Krishna consciousness and are really very, very good at promoting deviant ideas.

Were the Founder-*Ācārya* with us today, he would be ablaze with indignation and outrage. He would blast them blisteringly.



Neo-*smārtas*: Worse than the Ritviks

Important premise: I don't have any sympathy for the ritviks, those who promote the bizarre theory that Srila Prabhupada (or anyone) can continue initiating disciples after leaving this world. Srila Prabhupada never spoke about the idea and no *śāstra* ever mentioned it. In fact, in the late '90s, I coordinated the production of the book "[100 Deviations of Ritvikism](#)," a compilation of arguments against the ritvik imaginations.²⁸

Having hopefully settled that I don't support the ritvik heresy, I am going to explain why neo-*smārtaiism* could be even more dangerous than ritvikism. Ritvikism, in one sense, only deals with the concept of initiation, specifically with the ceremony. In a sense, ritvikism in itself doesn't change much: the priests allegedly officiating on behalf of the Founder-



Ritvik japa-mala handing in Bangalore. Paradoxically, being this ritvik initiated by Jayapataka Maharaja, by becoming "Srila Prabhupada disciples," the new initiates suddenly become his spiritual uncles, and he becomes their spiritual nephew. Weird and surreal.

Ācārya, or the people orchestrating the whole charade, become the real gurus of the initiates. They instruct the aspiring disciples; they decide when the person is ready to take initiation "from Srila Prabhupada"; they choose the names; they hand the *japa* beads; they continue instructing the initiates after the ritual, etc. The whole ritvik thing is basically an unauthorized performance; but, relationally, in terms of the guru-disciple interaction, the ritviks or their handlers act as normal gurus; often

²⁸ https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1Iwi_3Xmxossnx5yl5oc6KovWnbfZWFk3 - last in the list of files.

having much more control over their "Srila Prabhupada disciples" than the regular ISKCON gurus have over their regular disciples. Because the fundamental elements of the guru-disciple relation are archetypal, its basic functional dynamics don't change, even after changing nomenclature (no more "guru" but "officiant") or theoretical belief (no more "disciple of such-and-such living devotee," but "disciple of Srila Prabhupada"). Even, say, a *Buddhist guru*, although being an atheist who neither represents God nor any bona fide *sampradāya*, and even not teaching any scriptural truth, he is still a guru for his disciple, since the prototypical relation of teacher and student remains. Same with the ritviks, they may call themselves whatever they like, but they are the (misleading) gurus of their deluded "Srila Prabhupada disciples." Anyway, Krishna is in the heart, and He knows perfectly the degree of sincerity (or lack of it) of His devotees. And ritviks are also devotees. But let's analyze the comparisons between ritviks and neo-*smārtas*.

Ritviks - in their own obtuse way - put Srila Prabhupada "in the center"; while neo-*smārtas* try their best to delegitimize and sideline Srila Prabhupada when his instructions clash with their prejudices. Neo-*smārtas* systematically erode the faith of the devotees in Srila Prabhupada by relativizing, delegitimizing, or mispresenting his books, lectures, letters and conversations – all his teachings. Ritviks, at least on paper, don't (besides dismantling Srila Prabhupada's instructions on guru-disciple).

Ritviks - in their own grotesque way - practice a form of egalitarianism: everyone can become a Srila Prabhupada's disciple! Neo-*smārtas* see Gaudiya spiritual egalitarianism as a deviation from *dharma* and instead promote birth-based elitism.

The ritvik conception - besides its central heterodoxy - in theory allows for following all the (other) instructions by Srila Prabhupada; but a neo-*smārtas* just to maintain his neo-*smārta* attitudes must actively challenge the core spirit and essential teachings of the *sampradāya*.

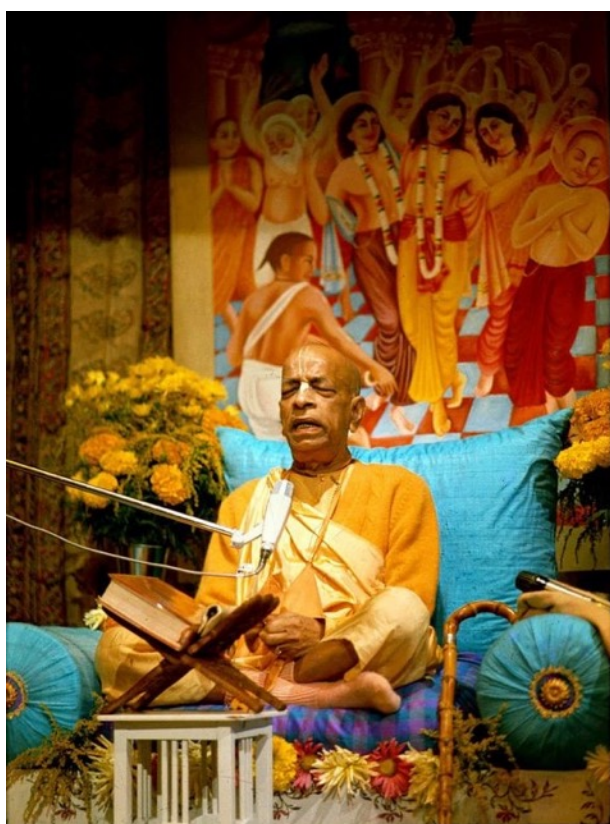
At least the ritviks have some indefensible but somewhat "rational" justification for their distortions. It's a fact that many ISKCON gurus had problems and that their fall-downs affected their disciples, and the whole movement, in very negative ways. Everyone "taking initiation from Srila Prabhupada" removes those risks. But there is no rational pretext for introducing *smārtism*, which simply represents a traditional enemy of the *sampradāya*, one that for centuries has worked against Gaudiya-vaisnavism.

The neo-*smārtas* crusade against women initiating disciples makes them a sort of "colleagues" of the ritviks, as both blatantly deviate from Srila Prabhupada's

standards for initiation; but I am not aware of anything in the ritvik ideology inherently against women. Individually each ritvik believer may have his or her own inclinations on the subject, but their "philosophy" doesn't reek of palpable sexism.

In conclusion: if I were forced to make the very unpleasant but obligatory choice between a ritvik-ISKCON and a neo-*smārta*-ISKCON, I would go for a ritvik-ISKCON. It would still be seriously off-kilter but not as off as the brazen anti-Gaudiya ISKCON of the neo-*smārtas*.

How Could It Happen? What's Next?



I truly hope the present leaders of ISKCON take the situation seriously, perform their sacred duty, and take a firm stand against the present neo-*smārta* doctrinal ascendancy. They would thus regain their reputation within the world of ISKCON as true defenders and protector of the *siddhanta*. If the present generation of leaders fails to remove the infection, I hope and pray that the next generation will succeed. ISKCON's loyalty to the *sampradāya*, its fidelity to Mahāprabhu and the Founder-*Ācārya* are the essential elements for its success; we can't allow the neo-*smārtas* to hijack and crash the movement.

The reader may wonder: how did the neo-*smārtas* manage to become so influential in India, despite the presence of so many gifted, intelligent Vaisnavas? We could identify various reasons and each of the leaders may have their own individual responsibilities; but, to explain the possible causes of allowing this infiltration: distraction; lack of training in socio-theological matters; being unfamiliar with the history and *siddhanta* of the *sampradāya*; lack of philosophical acumen; indifference; succumbing to the personal influence and aggressivity of certain individuals; focusing on administrative topics at the expense of exploring deeper scriptural principles; a superficial, doctrinarian, and jingoistic acquaintance with *śāstra*;

inebriation from the nationalistic, Hindutva intoxication; being brainwashed and succumbing to the hammering of false propaganda; aversion to conflict; sheep mentality; groupthink; being trapped in echo-chambers; hesitation to disagree with seniors (exaggerate and misplaced obsequiousness); failing to recognize the difference between Vedic and pseudo-Vedic; latent or overt personal leanings toward sexism and misogyny; fear to look bad; fear of economic loss; fear to lose power and position...

Leaders of ISKCON India may have been individually affected by one or more of the above. Whatever the case may be, the result is that neo-*smārtas* influenced and even dominated the cultural conversation, even forming (and getting it officialized) the "ISKCON India Scholars Board" - which is essentially their deceptive front for *apa-sampradāya* propaganda; their "Headquarters for Promoting Neo-*smārta* Deviancy."

A few important leaders did express some opposition to the worrisome trends they observed. Stalwarts like Gopal Krishna Maharaja, Bhakti Caru Maharaja and Jayapataka Maharaja did speak up, but they were a small minority, and their words and votes couldn't carry the day. The loud and insistent clamor of the neo-*smārtas* surpassed in quantity and intensity the reasonable presentations of these Maharajas. Some devotees became baffled and allured by the volume of the neo-*smārtas* uproar instead of being persuaded by the logic and the *śāstric* evidence presented by loyal Srila Prabhupada's followers. Anyway, whatever happened, happened; whatever didn't happen, didn't happen. I am less interested in discussing the past than in creating a better future. I still have a lot of appreciation for the ISKCON India leaders (those who don't promote neo-*smārta* views); devotees who are doing tremendous service in the mission, despite whatever neo-*smārta* intrusion they might have unwittingly allowed to fester.

If you read the book so far, I am grateful to you. You can probably do more than you think in stemming the neo-*smārta* tide. At least you can share this book with friends and acquaintances; you can share essential quotes and arguments from this book in your conversations and lecturing; you can raise the alarm when you identify neo-*smārta* trends in your temple and community; you can actively post and re-post anti-*smārta* content on social media; you can write your own articles and books; you can record videos; if you host a show, you can interview anti-*smārta* speakers; if you are an administrator, you can avoid offering neo-*smārtas* a pulpit; if you are a guru, you can instruct your disciples in the right propositions; if you are a GBC, you can pass legislation protecting ISKCON from neo-*smārta* deviancy. The sky is

the limit. Certainly, the neo-*smārtas* have shown enthusiasm and energy in spreading their *apa-sampradāya*. ISKCON *sampradāya* loyalists need to invest some time and vitality to counteracting their propaganda.

I am a dead man. Just waiting confirmation. Either the force of time or the criminal interventions of antagonists will soon shut my mouth. Obviously, the defense of the *sampradāya* cannot depend on me. But if everyone does his or her part, ISKCON can defeat the neo-*smārtism* monster. At least for the sake of the future generations.

Om Tat Sat



Appendix One - Which Vedic Culture? "Open" or "Closed"?

by Mahaprabhu Gaura Das



Mahaprabhu Gaura Prabhu kindly agreed to have this essay published in this book. I find his insights balanced and penetrating. Through a bird view analysis of thousands of years of human religious dynamics, he lucidly delineates the genesis of two different approaches to sanatana-dharma, one 'closed' and the other 'open.' These two outlooks manifest in what I call the bunker-varṇāśrama (a smārta-infused, rigid social system based on body-based privilege) and the Gaudiya-vaisnava-daiva-varṇāśrama (centered on the missionary spirit of Lord Caitanya). I hope you enjoy his essay and find it as illuminating as I did.

Introduction: The Timeless Jihad

My dear Godbrother Kaunteya Prabhu JPS recently announced on Facebook his "jihad" (as one of his opponents called it), a holy war against the "smārta" devotees of ISKCON. According to Kaunteya Prabhu some smārta-like devotees present many topics of Krishna consciousness wrongly. Not only do they interpret some cherry-picked Bhaktivedanta-*vaṇi* references on Vedic culture and *varṇāśrama* in a literalist, fundamentalist, and ultra-conservative way, but they aggressively attempt to impose their belief system on others. The "liberal" devotees nourish different hermeneutics; they read the same Bhaktivedanta-*vaṇi* through different lenses and consider their own alternative view as fully legitimate.

Two face-to-face encounters with Kaunteya Prabhu in Mayapur triggered me into rethinking my own understanding of Vedic culture, *varṇāśrama*, and *śāstric* literalism. I may not fully agree with everything he writes and says, but he made me



reflect on the universality of the schismatic dynamics. What are the similarities in the breakups of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, of Sunni and Shia Islam, and of Orthodox and Catholic Christianity? And what about the 1937 schism between Caitanya Matha and Gaudiya Mission? Are such estrangements natural and unavoidable? Should a religious denomination do everything possible to reconcile its internal differences, or is it sometimes best to let go and live on as separate entities?

The grand narratives of religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are essentially accounts of clashes of civilizations and theologies; their culture and tradition defined by polemics, dialectical confrontations, holy wars, martyrdoms, and schisms. Even intra-religious dialogue can sadly turn into a bloody madness allegedly instigated by God; a God who in the Old Testament supposedly told His true believers to "kill them all" (referring to their opponents).

In Vaisnavism the jihad can and should be predominantly turned inward, sublimated through transcendentalized introspection. That's why I had initially chosen Vaisnava devotionalism as my path, for I perceived it as the path to true transcendence.

Vedic Culture - Not Immune to Clashes of Civilization

I am from the Balkans, the testing ground for civilizational clashes in the western world. In 1054 the Balkans were split into half, into the two worlds of Catholic and Orthodox Christianity. For a few centuries they crusaded against each other and later they clashed with the invading Islamic armies and ideas. The struggle extended for a thousand years and now appears irresolvable. Most of the Catholic and Orthodox priests of the region are absorbed in the feeling of having been historically victimized; and this sentiment comes to define their religiosity. They are gripped in defensiveness, their worldview shaped by their obsession of having been oppressed.



I was shocked listening to their elaborate expositions of collective trauma as the core of their belief system. Between 1991 and 1995 I watched these priests intensely preaching religious violence on the national televisions. Daily, the main TV programs were showing bishops from both sides blessing tanks, cannons,

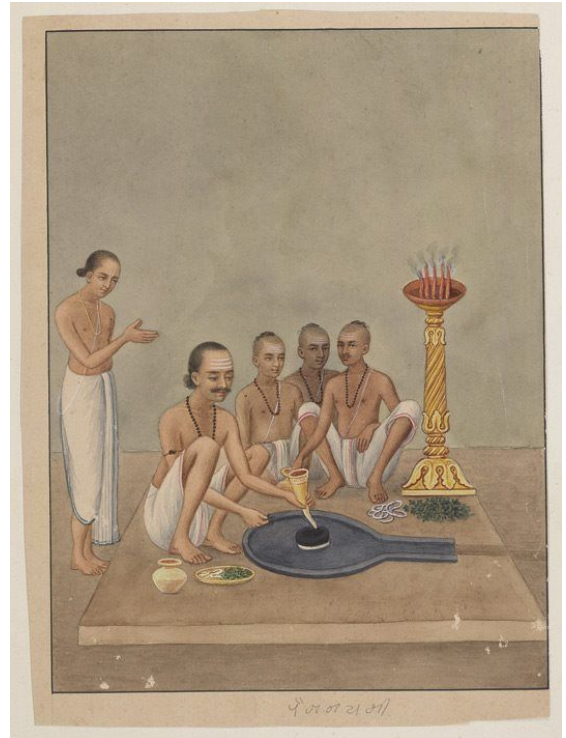
and missiles. At that time I was crying seeing all that. I decided to become a Hare Krishna and start “something completely different” (to echo the Monty Python irony). In good faith I embraced the Vedantic Vedic culture, declaredly beyond all bodily designations. I considered it completely transcendental to ethnic and state religions, untouched by regional conflicts and geo-political tactics. But that was the naivety and idealism of my twenties.

I soon found out that Vedic culture is no extraneous to the dynamics of violent religious hostilities. Vedic culture directly and indirectly shared in many disputes and fights. For many, Vedic culture or *sanatana-dharma* is also defined by thousands of years of oppression, victimization, and collective trauma. For most Hindus the expeditions of Ghazni, Ghoris, and Aurangzeb - their destruction of thousands of temples and the slaying of millions - justify the Hindu exclusivist posture. And that resentment has been perpetuated through many generations. Millions of children are programmed in their cradles with religious hate. For their entire lives they will believe that love "for our way" means loathing for "the others' way." Most "Vedic followers" never rise above this mentality. They consider it an essential aspect of

sanatana-dharma and validate it through the chronicles of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

The Vedic Incubator: The Orthodox, Antiseptic Glass Box

This foreigner-agnostic, circle-the-wagons attitude, creates the concept of Vedic culture as an "incubator," a glass box filled with artificial atmosphere. Those living in such a container consider being contaminated from the outside as the greatest danger. Such "closed Vedic culture" is based on traditional, orthodox superstitions, such as the one banning Hindus to cross the ocean. If from India you sail west, you arrive to the Muslim ports of Persia, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Egypt and down to Zanzibar. After a week or two at sea you must refill your water tanks. If you drink that "Muslim water" you become a Muslim.



Some Vaisnavas worship the "Vedic incubator," and define Vedic culture by the selected items and ideas that resisted and survived the foreign invaders. Wooden *padukas* resisted Muslim chappals, *chadars* withstood Arabic *kurtas*, and straw-huts resisted Islamic architecture. Affected by such religious fetishism, some Vaisnavas believe that *padukas*, *chadars*, and straw-huts possess some supernatural power to make you more Krishna conscious. Psychology generally explains such fetishism as the consequence of sexual trauma in childhood or as the frustrations with the opposite gender.

It's a defensive pose, intertwined with the constant fear that viruses may enter the incubator. Such Vaisnavas react by cherry-picking selected references from the *dharma-śāstras*, which they take as their ultimate authority (higher than the *bhakti-granthas*) and as the bastions that made Vedic culture survive the waves of foreign intruders. This survivalist philosophy is centered on the phobia to pollute the incubator with extraneous infections, invisible, subtle cultural influences. Such fear

becomes the "*para-dharma*," the highest religious principle for Vaisnavas subscribing to the "closed" Vedic culture doctrine. Historically, such mentality swiftly leads to the caste system.

Āsura-varṇāśrama, Good or Bad?

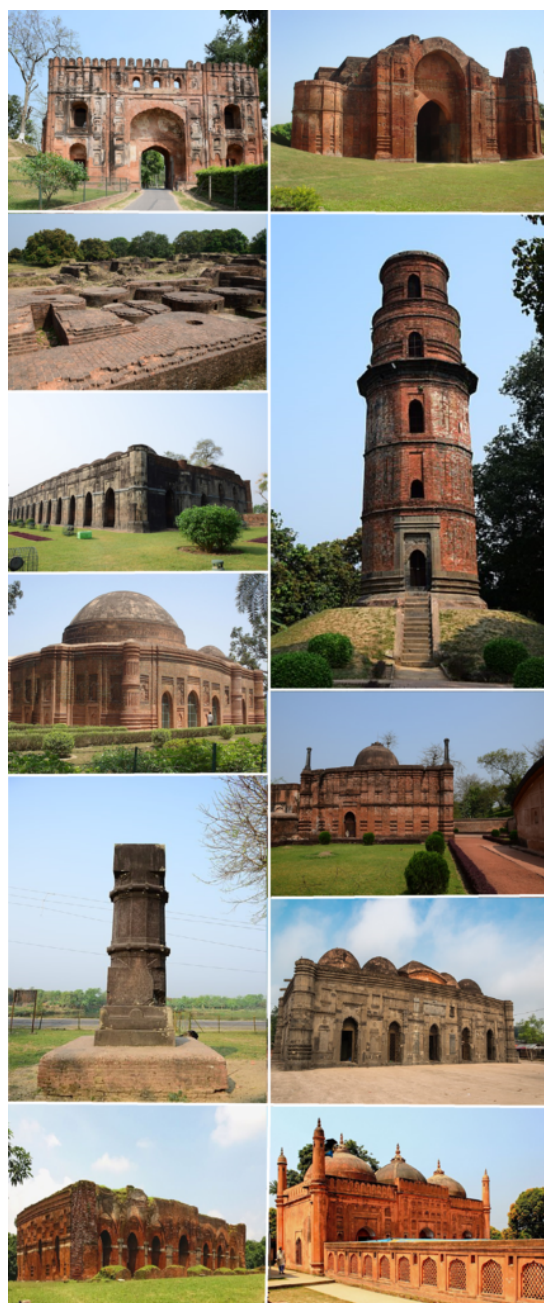
The Vedic incubator had both benign and malign aspects. The Vedic caste system (*āsura-varṇāśrama*) resisted the noble ideas of Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian egalitarianisms. Each of these civilizations at one point dominated India and offered equal opportunities based on *guṇa-karma-vibhāgaśaḥ*, the divisions determined by the three modes of material nature and the work associated with them (as per Bg 4.13). But Vedic culture refuted that approach to avoid being digested by the invaders. The invaders, through their equal opportunity policies, extracted the local intelligentsia and engaged it as clerks, apparatchiks, and tax-collectors - all mediating with the indigenous people. The Indian sub-continent was plundered with the help of local collaborators, bribed into the upward social mobility that casteism had denied them.

In its defensive stand *āsura-varṇāśrama* reduced *catur-varṇyam* (four *varṇas*) into *dui-varṇyam* (two *varṇas*): *brāhmaṇas* (those who uncompromisingly and puritanically resisted foreign ideas) and *sūdras*, all the rest. All *kayasthas* - the new tax-collecting *ksatriya* class - became the new local aristocracy catering to Muslim lords. *Kayasthas*, *vaisyas*, and *sūdras*, were all categorized as *sūdras* by the *brāhmaṇa* elite as a punishment for collaborating with the foreign intruders. "Beware of mingling with foreign ideas, partnering with those encroaching into Vedic culture, philosophy, economy, and theocracy - or you will be excommunicated and expelled!"

The Vedic incubator model also led to the notorious obsession with pedigree hierarchy, the genealogical fixation with *gotra*, *varṇśa*, and *jāti* taken as sources of cultural purity. In one sense, the approach saved Vedic culture. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura (hated by those nationalists depicting him as a collaborator with the *mlecchas*) admits that Roman and Greek aristocracy disappeared due to mixing with Ostrogoth, Visigoth, and Vandal barbarians, while the Vedic, Indian high classes survived through the rigidity of the caste system. But Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura also strongly advocated the "open Vedic culture," one that relates with foreign ideas, ideals, and practices while remaining free from both assimilatory and auto-

segregating attitudes. He promoted the "middle path," the integrational philosophical doctrine of *yukta-vairāgya*,

Yukta-Vairāgya as the Golden Middle Path



Views of Gauda, in Bengal, the capital of Alauddin Husain Shah, where Rupa and Sanatana worked.

The two brothers Amar and Santosh had exceptional qualities. Through the Islamic policy of equal opportunity, they were awarded the highest position obtainable by local Hindus. They became Dabir Khās and Sākara Mallik, later initiated by Lord Caitanya as Rupa and Sanatana. They not only drank "Muslim water," but, to a degree, adopted the Muslim habits. According to the orthodox Vedic *brāhmaṇas* their return to Vedic culture was impossible, but Rupa and Sanatana led a double life authorized by Sri Caitanya: after their "karmi-job" they returned home to worship Lord Krishna, ardently aspiring for pure *bhakti*.

In their home, the Muslim ruler, Nawab Hussein Shah, built for them a temple of Krishna and a Vrindavana garden outfitted with replicas of Rādhā-kuṇḍa and Syama-kuṇḍa. Rupa Gosvami thus assimilated the notion that some items of Islamic origin can be offered to Lord Krishna, and that there is a golden middle path, a balance between assimilation and segregation. In other words, he ascertained that one can be Krishna conscious *outside* the Vedic cultural incubator, provided one maturely interiorizes the doctrine of *yukta-vairāgya*.

Everything sattvic can be offered to the Lord. Muslim water, Muslim fruits, Muslim sweets, Islamic melodies, architecture, and even Islamic recipes (those with no meat, fish, eggs, onion, or garlic). Rupa Gosvami dressed the murti of Krishna as a Mughal

prince and he offered Him Turkish dishes such as *kofta* and *halava*. He dressed in Arab *kurta*. He sat on the *vyasasana*-like Islamic throne - examples of which are seen in the museums of the Delhi and Agra forts, in the Tehran palace, and in the Topkapi in Istanbul. Rupa Gosvami thus established an important principle: Vedic culture is not meant to function as an ethnic incubator for the indigenous peoples of South Asia, but a set of socio-theological, universal principles applicable globally, a philosophical standard that can embrace the entire world.

Everything originally grown outside of India, from anywhere on the planet - such as potatoes, tomatoes, and all sorts of other fruits and vegetables - is offerable to Śrī Krishna. If you live in Siberia, don't offer the Lord that hibernated, tasteless mango from the supermarket, but pick local forest berries; the Lord will like them more.

Yukta-Vairāgya as the Basis of True Spiritual Universalism

According to the philosophy of *yukta-vairāgya*, the Lord accepts *patram*, *puspam*, *phalam*, *toyam* (a leaf, a flower, a fruit, and water) if offered with love and devotion. Offering, say, a thousand-year-old recipe from the Ramanuja *sampradāya* is not automatically more pleasing, more Vedic, or more conducive to Krishna consciousness. Sri Krishna is not a South Asian god, who limits Himself to eat only the dishes of the Indian subcontinent; no, He extends Himself to the entire planet to reciprocate with all. Krishna doesn't need to be constrained within the Vedic incubator - and neither do his devotees. "Gaudiya" is not an ethnic denomination. It's not that those devotees unable or unwilling to Bengalize themselves will necessarily make less spiritual advancement. *Bhakti* is independent of bodily and ethnic designations.

Some Vedic fetishists have trouble with that, and don't offer tomatoes and potatoes because un-Vedic, brought by foreign invaders. But the Lord doesn't have such problems. When Muslims brought to Puri the *khaja*, a Turkish sweet, Lord Jagannatha disclosed that He wanted to eat it every day. He doesn't have a problem with Muslims sewing His clothes, or writing Him love poetry, or sponsoring His worship (as Emperor Aurangzeb did by donating lands to the Jagannatha temple).

One hundred years later the soldiers of the British garrison in Puri accompanied the Ratha-yatras with their orchestra, put the logo of Jagannatha on their military documents, and experienced Lord Jagannatha revealing Himself to them as God;

this even if they couldn't enter the Sri Mandira due to being "*mlecchas* and *yavanas*."

Modern *Acāryas* Teach Vaisnava-Vedic Universalism

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura couldn't establish himself as the traditional religious authority of the orthodox Hindus due to being a *sūdra* (*kayasthas* were counted as *sūdras* in *āsura-varṇāśrama*), but he was given an equal opportunity treatment by the British and, by his exceptional qualities, raised to the highest administrative position the British colonialists sanctioned for the locals. Thus Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura understood Vedic culture to extend beyond the Vedic incubator of the orthodox *brāhmaṇas*, who, fearing to contaminate themselves, refused to learn English and snubbed modern technological discoveries.



Gaur Mohan De sent his son Abhay Caran to the most anti-Vedic school of the time, the *Scottish Church College*, but it worked out as the best preparation for Srila Prabhupada's worldwide mission; for his saving us all. Had he gone to some Vedic *gurukula*, I doubt it would have been as conducive.

Some opine that Srila Prabhupada's liberal and universal salvationist spirit was only a tactical introduction into the real thing; that he wanted to eventually lock us all into the Vedic incubator, his liberalism and universalism mere tricks to lure us all into the glass box. Some, accustomed to singling out *dharma-śāstra* citations, describe *daiva-varṇāśrama* as abandoning the cities, join a *matha*-like ISKCON temple (Srila Prabhupada's temple transformed into a cloistered male monastery), or go to remote villages with no electricity. These, they seem to assume, are the only bona fide paths for salvation from the influences of Kali. Doomsday is *just now coming*.

"By the year 2000, millions will take refuge in our farms," I was told in 1996, in Italy, to get me to serve in the barn, with the cows. But - after 2000 - I witnessed four Italian farm projects collapsing and devotees returning to their "karmi jobs." Did they betray Vedic culture? Recently I served for a few years in a temple transmogrified into *matha*. They first expelled the ladies from the *asrama* and then introduced men-only *harinamas*. In the summer of 2022, I watched the *brahmacaris* singing downtown in front of hundreds of semi-naked girls (but they couldn't tolerate two or three sari wrapped Vaisnavis...). After the *harinama* the *brahmacaris* invited a group of teenage girls to sit together on a bench, to teach them how to play *karatalas*, *mridanga* and *harmonium*. After the extemporary musical training session, one sprinkled with collective giggling, the *brahmacaris* went back to their cloistered male monastery, hoping that the girls they invited would *not* come to the Sunday Feast, thus contaminating the sacred atmosphere of their hermitage. Some may call such behavior *schizophrenic*, but I just feel sorry, because I know that these *brahmacaris* are coerced into their brand of celibacy by blackmail and intimidation.

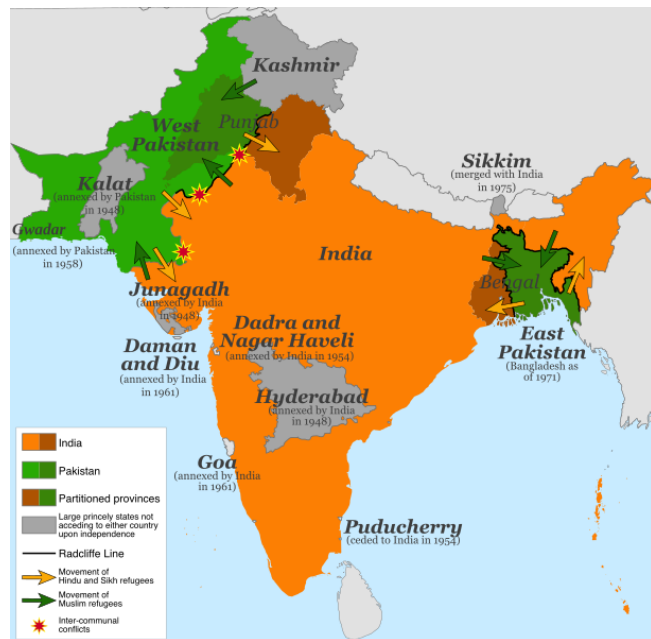
Concluding Remarks



Vedic culture is not one, but many. Puranic historiography is divided into sattvic, rajasic and tamasic Puranas. Vedic culture elevationist and salvationist mission approaches people according to their worldly predisposition. Sattvic Vaisnava Vedic culture is also divided into "closed" and "open" models. The "closed" one limits itself to the ethnic, anthropologic, and cultural conditionings of the Indian subcontinent. The "open" one transcends Indo-centrism and extends to the entire world. Srila Prabhupada was the ambassador of such open sattvic Vaisnava Vedic culture; his liberal adjustments of the 60's and 70's exemplify a model that's even more relevant in the 21st century.

Appendix Two - Geopolitical Consequences of Smārtaism

Srila Prabhupada explains that the damage caused by *smārta* attitudes spiraled into affecting even the geopolitical sphere: "This brahmin class, the hereditary brahmin class, played so many havocs in the history of India. The Pakistan is also due to this hereditary brahmanism. They hated so much the Muhammadans and the *śūdras*. First of all, they hated the *śūdras*, and then, when the *śūdras*, they became Muhammadans, they hated the Muhammadans. And gradually it developed that the so-called *śūdras* and Muhammadans, politically the Britishers took advantage, agitated them. They cut up India into Pakistan and Hindustan." (Lecture, Los Angeles, 7 Feb 1969)



The lack of compassion and inclusivity by these so-called *brāhmaṇas*, their lack of interest in uplifting their countrymen (and instead treating them with contempt), are the causes of the social fractures that culminated into the partition of India and Pakistan. Srila Prabhupada explains how the *brāhmaṇas'* disdainful attitude created a fertile ground for conversion to Islam and made Communism more attractive. Although Srila Prabhupada doesn't specifically mention it here, also Buddhism became appealing to many in Indian society because of the snobbishness of the Hindu elites:

"Kṛṣṇa says that, 'Everyone has got the potency of coming to Me, go back to home, back to Godhead' . . . Now, who will make them qualified to go back to home, back to Godhead? That is the Vaiṣṇava, those who are actually very sincere servant of Kṛṣṇa . . . but unfortunately, in India . . . they neglect it. The so-called *brahmins*, so-called *gōsvāmīs*, so-called... they neglect this process . . . [The] Muhammadans, they protested that, 'India is going to be independent, but we do not wish to

participate with the Hindus. We must be separate.' Why? Because they have got a bad experience that the Hindus did not treat them very well . . . even *sūdra*. In South India, it was the process, so bad process, if *sūdra* is passing on the street, he has to cry, 'I am a *sūdra* passing on the street. Please close your door.' The *brahmins* would close the door so that they may not even see a *sūdra*, then everything will be spoiled, their food grains and everything. They will close. You see. Now the result is that South India, the Communists . . . the so-called



low-class people, *sūdras* and *caṇḍālas*, they are now in majority . . . So this negligence, this is not Vedic culture. Because they neglected. These Muhammadans . . . they were not imported from Afghanistan or Turkey or any Muhammadan country. They were Indians. But they were not given any facility for spiritual culture. The *brahmins* monopolized it. Although they would not do anything . . . they would keep these *sūdras* and the *caṇḍālas* downtrodden and ill-treated . . . this neglected class of men became Muhammadans. This is the history . . . because they



were not given chance . . . If everyone has got the potency to go back to home, back to Godhead, it is the duty of the Vaiṣṇava to educate the whole world how to go back to home, back to Godhead. This is Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. This is Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement." (Lecture on SB 1.2.2, Rome, 26 May 1974)

True *sanatana-dharma* followers - what to speak of real *brāhmaṇas*! - should be aligned with the spiritual egalitarianism upheld by Lord Krishna in the *Gita* (5.18):



*vidyā-vinaya-sampanne
brāhmaṇe gavi hastini
śuni caiva śva-pāke ca
paṇḍitāḥ sama-darśinaḥ*

"The humble sages, by virtue of true knowledge, see with equal vision a learned and gentle *brāhmaṇa*, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a dog-eater [outcaste]." Of course, that doesn't mean losing one's pragmatic discrimination and, say, allowing the cow free access to the Deities' kitchen or to engage the meat-eater to offer *arati* on the temple altar. But the underlying perception should be

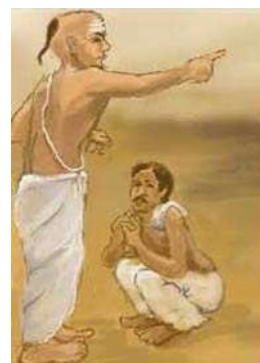
that everyone is a spirit soul, and especially all humans have the potential for spiritual improvement. Being proud of one's birth-based *brahmaṇism* without offering edification to the other groups, represents a corruption of *varṇāśrama*.

I am always surprised when ISKCON devotees protest egalitarianism; especially when the protesters themselves have been initiated as *brāhmaṇas* only because of the egalitarianism of Caitanya-vaisnavism. They seem to forget the "equal opportunity" spirit of the *Gīta*, which declares that even the lowest can be raised to the highest position. Gaudiya-vaisnavism is a practical manifestation of what Krishna declares in *Bhagavad-gīta*: "O son of Pṛthā, those who take shelter in Me, though they be of lower birth, women, *vaiśyas* [merchants] and *śūdras* [workers], can attain the supreme destination." (Bg 9.32) I find it perplexing that those who have been welcomed, accepted, and raised to the platform of Vaisnavism by Gaudiya inclusiveness, later resent and condemn egalitarianism. Some of them were born as *mlecchas* in the West (or as non-Hindus in India), and now they challenge the same missionary inclusiveness that rescued them from their fallen condition? It doesn't make any sense.

Everything gross, the visible or tangible, starts from the subtle, the imperceptible, the incorporeal. A fundamental moral malady - in this case the *brāhmaṇas* neglecting their *dharma* to fan the spiritual spark of people - can escalate into macro-effects shaping the borders of nations. That's why I am stressing the danger of the neo-

smārta infiltration. It's like a virus: nobody sees it entering the body. It may then take days before any symptoms appear; but at the end the whole body may collapse. Similarly, some neo-*smārta* attitudes may appear harmless, even beneficial at the beginning ("We are moving toward tradition, toward being more Vedic," the neo-*smārtas* evangelize), but they are merely re-presenting the same caste consciousness that ruined India. Neo-*smārtas* weaken ISKCON's capacity for being compassionate, relevant, and effective in the world.

As Srila Prabhupada explains above, before it were the Indian lower classes who, being mistreated, relinquished their Hindu identity, cutting their connection with their Vedic roots. Today the target of neo-*smārta* prejudice may be mostly (but not exclusively) women (50% of humanity). Such bigotry wears down ISKCON's philosophical integrity, its moral standing, and its reputation (besides exponentially multiplying Vaisnava-*aparadhas*).



The neo-*smārta* policy of humiliating and marginalizing an entire gender will encourage more and more people to say, "bye, bye" to *sanatana-dharma*; as it happened with the ill-treated lower castes. Furthermore, people who are already outside of *sanatana-dharma* will feel disgusted by a religious group they perceive as casteist, sexist, and elitist. Sober individuals will feel repulsed by the neo-*smārtas*' arrogant haughtiness and will dismiss ISKCON as another retrograde, abusive, and irrelevant cultural relic.

Srila Prabhupada liberally distributed the techniques of *bhakti-yoga* throughout the world. On behalf of Lord Caitanya he introduced all sorts of people to Krishna consciousness, practically showing that *everyone* can be elevated to Vaisnavism by the grace of a Vaisnava. In this way, he personified the *Bhagavatam* verse that says that everyone can be uplifted if they shelter in a devotee:

*kirāta-hūṇāndhra-pulinda-pulkaśā
ābhīra-śumbhā yavanāḥ khasādayaḥ
ye 'nye ca pāpā yad-apāśrayāśrayāḥ
śudhyanti tasmai prabhaviṣṇave namaḥ*

"Kirāta, Hūṇa, Āndhra, Pulinda, Pulkaśa, Ābhīra, Śumbha, Yavana, members of the Khasa races and even others addicted to sinful acts can be purified by taking shelter of the devotees of the Lord, due to His being the supreme power. I beg to offer my respectful obeisances unto Him." (SB 2.4.18)

A few highlights from the purport: "there is no bar against anyone's advancing in the matter of God realization . . . by becoming a devotee everyone is eligible to return home, back to Godhead. The only qualification is that one take shelter of a pure devotee of the Lord who has thorough knowledge in the transcendental science of Kṛṣṇa (*Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*). Anyone from any part of the world who becomes well conversant in the science of Kṛṣṇa becomes a pure devotee and a spiritual master for the general mass of people and may reclaim them by purification of heart . . . The system of caste, or *varṇāśrama-dharma*, is no longer regular even amongst the so-called followers of the system. Nor is it now possible to reestablish the institutional function in the present context of social, political and economic revolution . . . The conclusion is that the Lord, being all-powerful, can, under any and every circumstance, accept anyone from any part of the world, either personally or through His bona fide manifestation as the spiritual master. Lord Caitanya accepted many devotees from communities other than the varṇāśramites, and He Himself declared, to teach us, that He does not belong to any caste or social order of life, but that He is the eternal servant of the servant of the Lord who maintains the damsels of Vṛndāvana (Lord Kṛṣṇa). That is the way of self-realization."

Srila Prabhupada ki jaya.



Appendix Three - Who Are These People?

In recent years, without the personal presence of the Founder-*Ācārya* to nip them in the bud, *smārta* theories have thrived in ISKCON, often mistaken for positive, traditionalistic reforms. A major challenge in recognizing *smārta* deviations is that neo-*smārta* leaders can be extremely *religious*. Among them we often see very stable *grihastha* couples, *brahmacaris* who tie their *kaupinas* very tightly, and even a *sannyasi* who is perhaps the most frugal and austere in the whole Society. From the superficially moralistic point of view, one can't find anything wrong with them. On top of that, they say "Vedic" every six words, they appeal to "*śāstra*" every twelve words, and they mention "*varṇāśrama*" every eighteen.



Native Pandit reading the *Shastras*.

Neo-*smārtas* are more eager than the average *bhakti-yogi* to adopt and implement remote textual clauses, codes and codicils; more meticulous in implementing ethnic Hindu minutiae. The neo-*smārtas*' outward piety and punctiliousness make them more dangerous than, say, an obviously slack devotee - someone that nobody in the devotional community takes seriously. No, neo-*smārtas* can be truly virtuous in a mundane sense. Some of them build real power through penances, but often their *tapasya* also hardens their heart and make them ireful, indignant, and confrontational; constantly peeved by this or that symptom of decadence, real or imaginary. When they perceive any disagreement with their doctrines, neo-*smārtas* often speak harsh words, even about devotees who are senior to them in age, experience, and wisdom. Gee, some of these people are always angry! Not a great publicity for the *susukham kartum avyayam* idea, the notion that devotional service is joyfully performed (Bg 9.2). Some of them have adopted a perpetually frowning expression; through facial appearance and acerbic words they perennially condemn the impiety of the world (and the debauchery of the rest of ISKCON).

Despite their stern and reprimanding disposition (and their efforts at killing the spirit of Gaudiya-vaisnavism) innocent devotees may get attracted to the neo-*smārta*'s unsmiling visages as a sign of *sacred indignation*. Neophytes may wish to learn from the neo-*smārtas* how to become more "Vedic" (whatever that means in the neo-*smārtas*' mind) and how to become less "Western" (whatever that means in their mind). Such neophyte don't realize that the mummified, calcified customs neo-*smārtas*' want to impose on ISKCON block, instead of facilitating, the flow of love and compassion inaugurated by Lord's Caitanya

The neo-*smārta* prejudices drive them to dig up remote, anachronistic scriptural prescriptions and to regard them as relevant and universal. Some of the customs they propose as social panacea are obsolete at best and pernicious at worst. "But they are in the *smṛtis*; how can



they be insidious?" protest the neo-*smārta*. Yes, they are in the *smṛtis*, but they are not for Gaudiya-vaisnavas, they are for people living in different historical, cultural, and economic milieus; especially people trapped in the caste system.

It's hard to cure a disease that's hard to diagnose. Similarly, it's difficult to spot philosophical deviations promoted by devotees who outwardly look very *pukka*:

Prabhupāda: **You'll find among *smārta brāhmaṇas* they are also some of them Vaiṣṇavas, but they are impersonalists.**

Prof. Hopkins: . . . You would say that those, those *smārtas*, say - and I know *smārta brāhmaṇas* who are worshipers of Viṣṇu - you would say they still are impersonalists in some ultimate sense . . .

Prabhupāda: **No, it is very difficult to pick them out. Most of the so-called Vaiṣṇavas, they are impersonalists.**

(Conversation, Philadelphia, 13 July 1975)

Wikipedia talks about the historical sources of resemblance: "Smarta tradition . . . reflects a Hindu synthesis of four philosophical strands: Mimamsa, Advaita, Yoga, and theism . . . There has been considerable overlap in the ideas and practices of the Smarta tradition with other significant historic movements within Hinduism,

namely Shaivism, Brahmanism, Vaishnavism, and Shaktism . . . Smarta tradition attempted to integrate varied and conflicting devotional practices."²⁹

Srila Prabhupada elaborates on the challenge of distinguishing *smārta* traits: "Mundane religious activity is known as *smārta-viddhi*, but transcendental devotional service is called *gosvāmi-viddhi*. Unfortunately many so-called *gosvāmīs* are on the platform of *smārta-viddhi*, yet they try to pass as *gosvāmi-viddhi*, and thus the people are cheated." (Cc *Madhya*, 25.121)

Srila Prabhupada writes a purport in *Caitanya-caritamṛta* that I find intriguing and terrifying: "A mundane person in the dress of a Vaiṣṇava should not be respected but rejected. This is enjoined in the *śāstra* (*upekṣā*). The word *upekṣā* means neglect. One should neglect an envious person. A preacher's duty is to love the Supreme Personality of Godhead, make friendships with Vaiṣṇavas, show mercy to the innocent and reject or neglect those who are envious or jealous. There are many jealous people in the dress of Vaiṣṇavas in this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, and they should be completely neglected." (Cc *Madhya*, 1.218, purport) I wonder which "jealous people" Srila Prabhupada had in mind when writing the above... We know about inimical people *outside* of the movement, but here the Founder-Ācārya is talking about insiders.



Invidia (Envy), allegorical painting by Giotto di Bondone, ca. 1305-1306

The problem is that *smārta* influences can be so deceptive that devotees may not even realize to be infected. For instance, there is a *sannyasī*, someone certainly victimized by *smārta* ideas, who, a few years ago, in his Vyasa-puja offering glorified Srila Prabhupada for opposing and denouncing the *smārtas*. When I read that, I thought: "What?! He is a zealous consumer and champion of *smārta* attitudes, and he is actively sowing unnecessary division and confusion, and is now praising Srila Prabhupada as the adversary of the *smārtas*?!" The self-delusion is remarkable.

This shows the insidiousness of the *smārta*-affected mindset. One might be heavily polluted without even knowing it. The mind can play amazing tricks, even on

²⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smarta_tradition

devotees, one may be a super-spreader of *smārta* propaganda, while simultaneously considering oneself a staunch antagonist of *smārta* beliefs.

Where Are These People Coming From? How Did We Get to the Present Situation?



My observations led me to develop a hypothesis, a theory that only partially illuminate the present situation because it applies only to some of the leading neo-*smārtas*. I can't empirically prove it, but please hear me out and see if it sounds plausible. Various Indian *smārta-brāhmaṇas*, *jāti-gosais* and other mixed Vaisnavas took birth in the West. Maybe they had a desire to see America or England, I don't know, but, for whatever reason or karmic complexity, they were born in the West, in the twentieth century. Sadly, some of them

also had difficult childhoods and they grew up deprived of motherly affection (perhaps due to their offenses to women in their previous life?). As a result, their innate *smārta* tendencies were exacerbated by their psychological maladjustments in connection with the feminine. Consequently, they developed (or intensified) their negative attitudes towards womanhood in general and started (or continued) to show signs of misogynism, gynophobia or even of venustraphobia (caligynephobia).

The typical male chauvinism of the *smārtas*, added to the lack of motherly love and care, created a volatile mixture of prejudice, producing a strong penchant for underestimating and repressing women. This manifested (and manifests) as an irrational loathing for even basic, reasonable "concessions" to women. Due to their psychic baggage, women empowerment, even in its most sattvic forms (as practiced for centuries in Gaudiya-vaisnavism), represents an indigestible anathema for them.

Although damaged, these Western-born *smārtas* and mixed Vaisnavas were basically pious, having performed religious rituals and even devotional activities in previous lives. But they also carried the inner imprints of *apa-sampradāya* misconceptions.



While growing up in the West they were introduced to ISKCON. For those with more *bhakti* backgrounds the attraction was immediate; but even for the others, ISKCON was still the most "Vedic" thing around. They joined. They performed devotional service, sometimes even in austere conditions, gaining perennial spiritual benefits. At one point some of them moved "back" to India, the fatherland of their previous birth; the cultural matrix of their subtle bodies.

Watering the Weeds

For a systematic understanding of the problem, we refer to the section of *Caitanya-caritamrita* explaining how the “**unwanted creepers**” of *apa-sampradāya* tendencies can grow (or re-grow) alongside the plant of devotion: “Out of many millions of wandering living entities, one who is very fortunate gets an opportunity to associate with a bona fide spiritual master by the grace of Kṛṣṇa. By the mercy of both Kṛṣṇa and the spiritual master, such a person receives the seed of the creeper of devotional service . . . If he waters the seed gradually by the process of *śravaṇa* and *kīrtana* [hearing and chanting], the seed will begin to sprout.” (*Cc Madhya*, 19.151-152) Srila Prabhupada explains: “Those with a background of pious life are eligible to receive life’s supreme benefit, and to bestow this benefit, the Supreme Personality of Godhead sends His representative to impart His mercy . . . The methods, rules and regulations by which one is perfectly trained in devotional service constitute the *bhakti-latā-bīja*, or seed of devotional service . . .” This is the mercy every ISKCON member receives but, “Unless one satisfies the spiritual master, he gets the *bīja*, or root cause, of *karma*, *jñāna* and *yoga* without the benefit of devotional service.”

Srila Prabhupada then explains that disobeying the guru causes the shrinking of the *bhakti-latā* and the overgrowth of undesirable attitudes: “One who is actually serious about advancing in devotional service should desire only to satisfy the

previous *ācāryas* . . . The devotee must therefore be very careful not to commit offenses against the spiritual master by disobeying his instructions.” Disobeying the Founder-*Ācārya* is what neo-*smartās* do all the time. The consequences are serious: “As soon as one is deviated from the instructions of the spiritual master, the uprooting of the *bhakti-latā* begins, and gradually all the leaves dry up.” *Apa-sampradāya* ideas then begin to appear attractive as if they were *the real thing*. “By one’s mental concoctions, one falls down.” Srila Prabhupada’s then quotes the second verse of the *Upadeśāmṛta*, by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī: “One’s devotional service is spoiled when he becomes too entangled in the following six activities: . . . (4) practicing the scriptural rules and regulations only for the sake of following them and not for the sake of spiritual advancement, or rejecting the rules and regulations of the scriptures and working independently or whimsically.” (*Cc Madhya*, 19.156-157, purport)

The Caitanya-caritamrita continues warning us: “Sometimes unwanted creepers . . . grow along with the creeper of devotional service. The varieties of such unwanted creepers are unlimited . . . If one does not distinguish between the *bhakti* creeper and the other creepers, the sprinkling of water is misused because the other creepers are nourished while the *bhakti* creeper is curtailed.” (*Cc Madhya*, 19.158 & 160) The neo-*smartās* promote notions contrary to *bhakti* as if they were the genuine article, but which



"Weed," by Linda Ravenscroft

instead simply choke the real plant of devotion. Srila Prabhupada explains that sometimes these two very different plants are difficult to distinguish: “Sometimes these unwanted creepers look exactly like the *bhakti* creeper. They appear to be of the same size and the same species when they are packed together with the *bhakti* creeper.” (*Cc Madhya*, 19.159, purport) And so within ISKCON, in which everyone more or less dresses the same and wears the same external markings, the neo-*smartās* may appear as harmless, loyal, and upright ISKCON members.

“If one chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* while committing offenses . . . one may try to support his philosophy by joining some caste or identifying himself with a certain dynasty, claiming a monopoly on spiritual advancement . . . or one may consider a Vaiṣṇava to belong to a mundane caste or creed. One may think, ‘This is a Hindu Vaiṣṇava, and this is a European Vaiṣṇava. European Vaiṣṇavas are not allowed to enter the temples.’ In other words, one may consider Vaiṣṇavas in terms of birth, thinking one a *brāhmaṇa* Vaiṣṇava, another a *sūdra* Vaiṣṇava, another a *mleccha* Vaiṣṇava and so on . . . or one may become a supporter of a hereditary caste system . . . All this means that the so-called devotee has become victimized by all these unwanted creepers and that the real creeper, the *bhakti-latā*, has been stunted.” (Cc *Madhya*, 19.160, purport) There is nothing new under the sun. The spiritual maladies described in this chapter by Lord Caitanya to Rūpa Gosvāmī are nothing new. It’s not that surprising to see them manifested today in ISKCON; but what’s required – sometime that has recently been missing in our Society - is strict vigilance. We must do better in preventing the escalation of unwanted creepers in the form of *apa-sampradāya* teachings, “A pure devotee can distinguish between the *bhakti* creeper and a mundane creeper, and he is very alert to distinguish them and keep them separate.” (Cc *Madhya*, 19.159, purport) I hope this book will serve as a wake-up call for the leaders who left such deviations fester on their watch.

Neo-*smārta* Explosion

The *smārta* inclinations of the new Gaudiya recruits were held in check by the intense ISKCON missionary drive of the '70s and the personal influence of the Founder-*Ācārya*. After Srila Prabhupada left, it became more difficult to protect these devotees (and ISKCON's purity) from their previous *smārta samskaras*. Their subliminal tendencies gradually started to manifest without restriction. Devotees who might have ostensibly acted in a dedicated and surrendered fashion, may be now acting as leaders of the neo-*smārta*, *apa-sampradāya* mutiny, functioning as the loud spokespersons of anti-Gaudiya sentiments.



It didn't help these vulnerable devotees to associate, in India, with all sorts of mixed-up and illiberal influences; with elitists and caste-centered traditions; and with phantasmagorical Hindutva romanticisms. In India, with its gazillion facets of socio-theological weirdness, these ISKCON members found a fertile ground (and plenty of accomplices) for their pursuit: turning Srila Prabhupada's Society into a *smārta* enterprise. They are now busy systematically dismantling, in theory and practice, the Gaudiya spirit of inclusivity and equal opportunity. They relentlessly promote pseudo-Vedic and tamasic-*varṇāśrama* superstitions; all in the name of purity and reform. Without Srila Prabhupada to nip their nonsense in the bud, and with the GBC occupied by a series of emergencies (and somewhat intimidated by the neo-*smārtas'* aggressivity), their impact and influence within ISKCON India spread almost unchecked. At least one of them started initiating disciples, thus gaining a sort of "captive audience" (disciples should listen to their guru, right?). As more *smārta*-inclined conditioned souls also took birth, inside and outside of India, the neo-*smārta* troops swelled.



Enter the Internet. Their *smārta* message increases in volume and resonance; their *apa-sampradāya* gospel begins to reverberate throughout the world, unhindered by geographical boundaries, victimizing anyone with latent *smārta* tendencies or limited grasp of Gaudiya traditions and *siddhanta*. And here we are, with the neo-*smārtas* spreading their bizarre, retrograde social theories far and wide, encouraging divisiveness and intolerant radicalism.

They recently created a staunch neo-*smārta* stronghold in the form of the so-called "ISKCON India Scholars Board," which attempts at providing their *apa-sampradāya* broadcastings with a veneer of academic respectability, despite the Board's obvious philosophical incompetence, tainted agendas, and manifested lack of intellectual integrity.



The twelve members of the pompously and illegitimately named “ISKCON India Scholars Board” (illegitimately because no legally registered or incorporated ISKCON India entity even established such board). These photos are how they present themselves on their site. I don’t know all of them personally, and so in some case I must give them the benefit of the doubt regarding their degree of commitment to neo-smārta deviations, but in their production as a group, and in at least some of their individual outputs, they consistently misrepresent the sampradāya, misleading ISKCON devotees on crucial socio-theological issues.

About the Author



Kaunteya das (Dr Carlo Oppecini, PhD Indovedic Psychology), a disciple of His Holiness Jayapataka Swami Maharaja, joined ISKCON in Rome, Italy, in 1980. He served (and in some case still serves) as:

- Book distributor; *gurukula* teacher; mediator
- Co-Minister, *ISKCON Congregational Development Ministry*
- Co-Chairman, *GBC Organizational Development Committee*
- Trustee & faculty member, *GBC College for Leadership Development*
- Member, *GBC Strategic Planning Team*
- Member, *GBC Nominations Committee*
- Coordinator, *ISKCON Constitution Project*
- GBC representative for Iran
- Special Duty Officer for ISKCON Brazil
- Member, Latin Regional Governing Body (RGB)
- Member, international Board of Directors, [Back to Godhead](#) magazine
- Chairperson, GLOWING (*Gaudiya Legacy Open Worldwide Institute, Navadvipa, Gauradesa*)
- Global Coordinator, *ISKCON Community Life*
- Coordinator: *Anti-smārta Campaign*

Authored the following books: *Bhakti-vriksha Manual; The Book of Icebreakers; Super Sunday; Did Srila Prabhupada Want Women Diksa Gurus?; Varnasrama Illuminations; How to Mess Up Varnasrama; Tough Questions, Difficult Answers on Srila Prabhupada's Contentious Remarks; plus this one: Neo-smārtas - ISKCON's Greatest Danger*



"There are so many *apa-sampradāyas*, thirteen at least in the counting by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura: *āula, bāula, kartābhajā, neḍā, daraveśa, sāṇi, sahajiyā, sakhībekhī . . . smārta, jāta-gosāṇi, ativāḍī, cūḍādhārī, gaurāṅga-nāgarī*. These thirteen, fourteen *apasampradāyas*. They are passing as Caitanya Mahāprabhu's *sampradāya*. But they're the worst, rejected."

- Srila Prabhupada, Conversation, Bhubaneswar, 24 Jan 1977



EYE of the STORM